The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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George Sugarman: a selection of **drawings from the years 1950-1982** and **recent small sculpture** at the **Robert Miller Gallery,** 724 Fifth Avenue, New York, from October 5 through October 23, 1982.

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Untitled, tempera on paper, 46 × 35″, 1971

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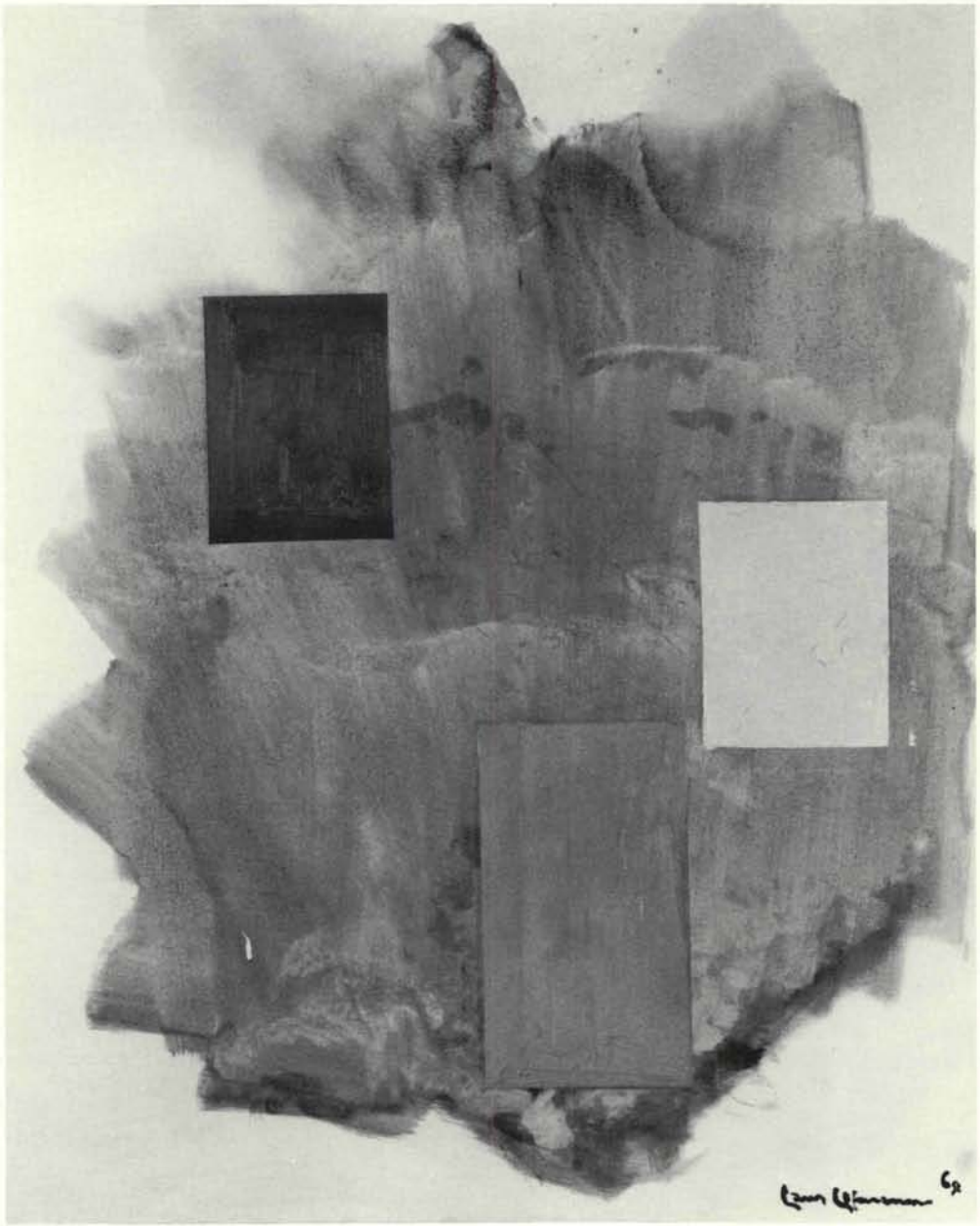

Hans Hofmann, *The Southwind,* 1965. Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in.

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The New Criterion *October 1982*

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The Interrogation interrogated: the fate of a Polish film

Poland produces about thirty-five feature films a year. Its motion picture industry is owned by the state, which finances production and distribution. It is supervised by the Polish Ministry of Culture and the central Party apparatus and organized into several studio units, usually headed by prominent film directors. Groups of writers and filmmakers are more or less permanently associated with these units.

Ryszard Bugajski's new film, *The Interrogation*, was made in Andrzej Wajda's famous film studio "X" and finished early this year, after a state of war had been imposed in Poland. Its subject is the Stalinist terror in Poland in the early Fifties. *The Interrogation* shows the plight of an innocent woman—played by Krystyna Janda (the leading actress in Wajda's *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron*)—caught in the wheels of the secret-police machine. It contains several drastic scenes of torture. These are unprecedented in East European cinema, which has, until now, treated this subject mostly by indirection.

In Poland the decision to release a film for public showing formally belongs to the deputy minister of culture in charge of the film industry. Controversial works like *The Interrogation* are often referred to higher authorities, primarily the Cultural Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In some cases even the Politburo may become involved. Nevertheless, customary forms and officially prescribed procedures are almost always observed.

In Poland, when a film has reached its final form it is presented to the deputy minister of culture, who convenes a so-called "co-laudation commission" for a closed screening. The deputy minister appoints the members of the commission—usually twenty to twenty-five people—from among a prepared list of professional and ideological experts. Other individuals connected with the film industry—artistic and literary directors from other studios, for instance—may be present at the meeting in an unofficial capacity. Immediately following the screening, the commission sits down for a couple of hours to discuss the film. The meeting ends with the group's recommendations concerning the film's future. The commission functions as an advisory group; its voice is rarely decisive.

The discussion of the co-laudation commission for *The Interrogation* was surreptitiously recorded by one of the participants. The excerpts of the transcript presented below clearly show that everyone present was aware that the decision about *The Interrogation*'s future would be made by others. The importance of the meeting lies elsewhere—in the light it sheds on the making of "cultural policy" in a Communist country and in the glimpse it provides of the cultural backstage of the political crisis that has wracked Poland in the last few years.

The ideological positions represented by various participants in the meeting are not, in and of themselves, remarkable. On the con-

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trary, they are predictable. It is the flavor of the arguments and the language employed that deserve our close attention.

The comments of the participants show a certain abstract quality; they are oblique, allusive, almost Aesopian. They avoid naming the issues directly; everyone relies on a mutual, unspoken understanding of what the fundamental questions are really about. In the central, unnamed void around which the whole discussion revolves, "Stalinism" is barely mentioned, "torture" exactly twice, "dictatorship" never. The speakers resort instead to indirection: "certain methods," "those times," "painful period," "certain wounds"—phrases intended to spare the sensibilities of those who might experience some discomfort if more direct terms were used.

The partisans of the film feel compelled to adopt an "objective" posture, arguing for the film's "historical truth" or even for the social benefits that might derive from showing a moral tale to the public. They deny that the story has any contemporary implications, even though, as Wajda points out in the letter that is read at the beginning of the meeting, *The Interrogation*'s screenplay originally contained a "contemporary theme" which was later eliminated.

The advocates of a dogmatic, strong-handed line find themselves in an easier position, bolstered by the martial-law regime. They can afford a more revealing frankness about the film's implied parallels between the Stalinist Fifties and the present day. Thus, the journalist Kazimierz Kozniewski, a supporter of the regime, states clearly that an attack on the people who issued the orders to shoot at the demonstrating workers in Poznan twenty-six years ago puts in doubt the legitimacy of their successors. Of course, he needn't have bothered. Everyone in the room could have drawn the parallel for himself: General Wojciech Jaruzelski, whose only claim to legitimacy had been an alleged statement in 1976 that "Polish soldiers would never again fire on Polish workers," was responsible for the massacre of seven colliery miners in Katowice on December 16, 1981, three days after a state of war had been declared.

In a Communist system, "cultural policy" is a self-cannibalizing expression: in this case, the political half swallows up the cultural and artistic. Indeed, "culture" and "art" are not pretty words when they become inextricably bound up with the politics of a Communist-military junta that must rely on tanks and guns to remain in control. Above all, such a regime must be on guard against anything that shows the truth about its mechanisms of power. Thus, it is not far-fetched to assume that the decision about the release of Bugajski's film had been made long before the co-laudation commission met last April. The only print of the film is now kept in the Central Cinematographic Administration in Warsaw. It will probably never be shown to the public; it may be physically destroyed.

Ironically, the frightened professor Golebiowski, whose comments close the discussion of the film, may be right. The issue is not whether the young director made an historical film or a contemporary one, or an abstract moral tale. Bugajski's intentions, in a way, are irrelevant. What counts is how a mass audience would receive *The Interrogation*—whether such an audience can be trusted to make the fine distinction between "Stalinist non-socialism" and "the socialism of the state of war." Apparently, it cannot.

According to Golebiowski and others at the meeting, Bugajski has made a "propagandistic" film. There is a kind of bitter justice in this epithet. The transcript of the meeting in Warsaw provides one more proof that a Communist regime, for whom "propaganda" was once the proudest weapon in its ideological arsenal, has in the end come to fear it too. —*Jerzy Warman*

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Transcript of the meeting of the co-laudation commission for Ryszard Bugajski's film *The Interrogation*— Ministry of Arts and Culture, Warsaw, April 23, 1982

Janusz Zaorski [*filmmaker, deputy to Andrzej Wajda, the artistic director of the film studio "X"*] reads a letter from Andrzej Wajda, who was directing a film in Paris at the time:

> I wanted very much to participate in the co-laudation of Ryszard Bugajski's film *The Interrogation*. After the film had already been submitted to the Ministry for approval I returned to Warsaw especially to take part in the discussion, thinking that the co-laudation would take place then. Unfortunately, it turned out otherwise. I wanted to be present because the film is a debut. A debut always carries a risk with it, but in this case I believe that Ryszard Bugajski has realized all the hopes that have been set on him. I regard *The Interrogation* as an outstanding work, produced with a great maturity of the director's craft, with excellent performances, employing modest means but at the same time deeply moving. We have had few such debuts in recent years. We have gained a new, mature talent.
>
> Doubts accompanied the decision to make this film: Was it appropriate? Was the contemporary theme necessary? We decided, together with the director, that these doubts were justified. The contemporary theme was completely eliminated from the film in its final form. *The Interrogation* is therefore an historical film, which deals with a dramatic subject that belongs to the past. A lot of attention has been devoted to it in the diaries [of the Stalinist period in Poland] that have appeared in the last few months. Therefore, I have worked very hard to have this film made, and, happily, I have not been disappointed. A very valuable and important film has been made, and we present it to you for your evaluation.
>
> Andrzej Wajda
> Artistic director, film studio "X"

Bohdan Poreba [*Filmmaker, head of the film studio "Profil," director of a highly nationalistic film, "Hubal," about a World War II partisan commander. Poreba has directed plays for the notorious "RF" theater, headed by Ryszard Filipski, an anti-semitic actor and director who has, in turn, directed films on historical themes—for example, "Coup d'Etat"—at the "Profil" studio. An ideological enemy of Wajda, Poreba is widely disliked in cinema circles. His father, a soldier in the Home Army underground during the war, was imprisoned during the Stalinist period. Poreba is also the chairman of the Grunwald Patriotic Association, a nationalistic and anti-semitic group created with the support of highly placed officials of the Communist Party in March 1981 to agitate against Jews in Solidarity and to counter liberal influences.*]: I would like to raise a point of order. Since this is a very special film and the discussion will surely be interesting, I have a question. Are only the members of the commission present in this room?

Minister S. Stefanski [*Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture, in charge of the film industry since February 1982; former Deputy Chairman of the*

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State Committee for Radio and TV]: No. But I think that even if outsiders are present, nobody will lack the courage to express his opinion, here as well as outside.

Kazimierz Kozniewski [*Writer, journalist at "Polityka," a weekly magazine edited by Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski. Strongly supportive of the martial law, Kozniewski published several articles in the main Party newspaper, "Trybuna Ludu," attacking the "hostile" attitudes of the intelligentsia. He was recently named editor-in-chief of a new magazine, "Odrodzenie" ("Rebirth").*]: It seems to me that this group is probably not capable of making a decision about this film, or even of presenting recommendations concerning it, following a discussion that will probably last an hour or so, because, in my opinion, we are dealing here with a greatly moving film, the first Polish picture of this kind. For political reasons this is surely the first such film in the history of the post-war, Polish people's cinema.

I would like to treat it, if I could, from the artistic point of view. I am captivated by the artistic direction of the film. It is surely a very mature piece as a work of art. Possibly there is, in one place, a discontinuity. In my judgment the film would be seamless if it ended with the scene where the girl receives the branch of a spruce tree, as a symbol of some kind of moral victory. What goes on afterwards is a kind of melodrama, expressed in an entirely different mode. This is really a criticism of the screenplay, however, rather than of the direction, a criticism that really does not affect the fundamental moral, political, and ideological content of the film.

The weakness of this film, I think—and perhaps it is a very serious weakness—lies in the fact that there is nothing but passionate emotion in it. It evokes a deep response in the audience. If it stirred our emotions here, it must, if shown publicly, evoke a great reaction in every viewer. It will evoke a moral reaction, an indignation at certain matters that have already been dealt with in literature. I do not understand why Wajda addressed himself only to the artistic question; or maybe I know why. Never mind. He could of course cite General Kuropieska's memoirs, which were published recently.[1] This is not the first time that this theme has been dealt with in literature. But in film, where the emotional impact is much greater than in literature, this is probably the first time that it has been treated in such a way.

I miss one very important thing in this. If one shows certain ways and methods, and awakens such great feelings of hatred for them, one should also ask where they sprang from, for what cause these degenerate things were undertaken. There is one sentence about this at one point in the film, but it is far from sufficient. The woman in the film is facing a completely absurd charge, totally unjustified; it is the methods used that are the heart of the matter. The viewer has a right to ask: What if the accusation was justified, would the methods be justified as well? In short, perhaps yes, somewhat; perhaps no. Still, I greatly miss in this film some kind of background, some kind of knowledge about the other side, about those persecutors who are seen, parenthetically, only in one idiotic scene (not idiotic from the standpoint of the plot, but idiotic in its essence), a drunken feast which ends with a uniformed security policeman pouring alcohol down the girl's throat.

There is extremism in this film. It is a distillation of all the horrible stories. The accumulation of hate in this film is enormous. It lacks some kind of attempt to show certain justifications. Every revolution is accompanied by terrible things; the questions must refer to its various aspects: causes, consequences, methods, and so on.

But I wanted to talk about something else, something that puts me at a loss with regard to this sheet of paper. [*He waves the evalua-*

1 General Jozef Kuropieska was arrested in 1950 with several other high officers in the Polish armed forces. Falsely charged with treason and espionage, he was tried in 1952 and condemned to death. The sentence was commuted when Kuropieska finally agreed to confess, five days *after* the trial ended. He was rehabilitated in 1956.

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tion form.] I would prefer to write an article or an essay about this film rather than answer the three questions this form asks. They are absolutely inadequate to the film, because one cannot separate the ideological from the artistic aspect. What does such a dichotomy mean anyway? The real question is different, and I don't know whether this group will be able to answer it at all.

These things have already been shown, told, and lived through in this country. This story dates from thirty years ago—a whole generation has grown up since such methods were employed. At every stage during the last twenty-five years we have learned that passing over certain matters in silence does not produce good results, that maybe certain wounds must be shown to the end and burnt out—in an artistic sense of course—to the end. On the other hand, we must ask ourselves, by showing the film at this moment, today (well, I do not mean in April—the distribution would take some time—but let's say in three or four months, or half a year, or even a year), what kind of emotions would be stirred, and against whom would they be directed?

Take the monument in Poznan.[2] It's not as if it was erected only against those who had been shooting then; it was also erected against those who have held power until now, in continuous succession since those times. And this is the large question that we must answer—if not our group, then the people who decide about the political situation in our country. They will have to weigh the effect of silence, of leaving certain things unsaid. Not saying things to the end has always had fatal consequences. On the other hand, to release this film now, in the present situation, what consequences would that bring? Also fatal consequences!

We are choosing—well, maybe not us, because we are only advisors, but perhaps we too have the duty to say it—between two bad alternatives. A film of such passion will evoke great passions in return. Still, to pass over those things in silence. . . But one could say: Silence? There are Kuropieska's memoirs, novels, Machejek's book, many other books; they waited for years to be published but the censors finally let them through. There is no silence on this subject. But we know that such a film, made in such a way, calling forth such passions, would have a different impact than even the publication of Kuropieska's memoirs in one hundred thousand copies of *Literary Life.* The story of Mrs. Duracz, the story of many other cases, they have not been a secret for a long time.[3] But showing this on the screen would be shocking, even more so since its effect would be so cumulative, compounded.

The beautiful aspect of the film is surely the victory of a certain moral stand over certain horrible methods. It is a beautiful victory that becomes apparent in that scene with the spruce-tree branch. I must say that it is a beautiful scene, and I must add that what happens later with the child—in that harrowing scene when the children are being taken back home—really puts everything together. For me that is another film altogether. It includes also the story of the father, who finally acknowledges his relationship with this woman although he had previously, in a way, abandoned her in that visiting room.

For me this is a very good film from the point of view of the director's craft, and it is deeply moving. Any solution, however, any decision concerning its future, will have to take into account negative, not positive, considerations. That is, the distribution of this film will bring about certain dangers, because

2 The monument to the workers who were shot during protest demonstrations in Poznan in 1956, unveiled in June of 1981.

3 Anna Duracz, wife of a hero of the Communist People's Army underground during World War II, was a secretary to Jakub Berman, a member of the Polish Politburo and the right-hand man of Boleslaw Bierut, the first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party in the Stalinist years. Mrs. Duracz was arrested in 1949 in connection with the so-called Field Affair, in which two American Communists, together with high Communist officials in Hungary and Poland, were accused of involvement in an espionage ring. She was held in prison without trial for several years before being released.

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certain things should be shown to the end. Maybe just once? Maybe a film like this should not be made again? Still, people will be writing books, they will be doing certain things, because history goes on and history returns, history shapes people and it will keep returning.

So I admit that I feel helpless, because fifteen minutes after the screening I am not even able to give a definite opinion about what to do with this film. One thing is certain: the decision should not be made lightly. These matters have lasted for a long time in our national situation, and they may last a few months longer. The decision should not be made lightly, either "yes" or "no." Perhaps it should be discussed some more. . . I feel rather helpless. . . Perhaps you, gentlemen, will have better advice to offer.

Ernest Bryll [*Writer, poet, and playwright; artistic director of the film studio "Silesia"; artistic director of the Polski Theater in Warsaw. Bryll left the Communist Party in 1981, before the imposition of the state of war.*]: Straight out, I think this film should be released. I think it is very good. I have only small reservations. Here and there it could be better, but there is no point in talking about that right now. It is a very good film and should be released. Why? Simply for the sake of normal, common knowledge of our nation's history. It deals with a certain fragment of our history, and it is well and good that it deals with it from the perspective of a common woman, a woman facing a completely unbelievable charge, where no organizational or ideological issues are involved. We have read many things like that, in *The Mother of the Kings* for example. But this film concerns the fate of a common, entangled human being; because of that it is even more deeply moving.

This film concerns the history of our nation; it must be released even if it is painful, even if some people will regard it as an exaggeration. Because if this film is not released, even more exaggerated things will have to be done, and the matter will continue to fester in us to the point where normal relief will be impossible. Art means, among other things, to bring about a catharsis, to explain, to lead to a certain discussion. We have just seen this being done in an excellent, artistic way. Yes, I am absolutely for releasing this film, the sooner the better.

Jerzy Jesionowski [*Writer, member of the Party, literary director of a film studio*]: I find myself in a very difficult situation because in order to express my judgment about this film I must violate a principle I believe in. I believe that when one judges a work of art one should not separate the form from the content, or, to express this another way, one should not separate the craft from the thought. I accept this principle, and yet in this case I must disregard it because I am not able to make a comprehensive judgment. Concerning the craft, I have the highest regard for what Mr. Bugajski has demonstrated here, as a test—since this is a debut—of his qualifications as a director. This film shows that we have here a man who knows how to make films. I will not expound on this subject any longer since the point is clear.

Concerning the thought, the content, however, I have serious objections. If this is an historical film (and we agreed with the point—even in Wajda's letter—that this is an historical film), then it is not an entertainment or adventure film, but a film with different aspirations. First of all, we should be making such a work in order to say something more, to add new elements to the knowledge we already have on this subject, not in order to stop at what others have already said, or even to regress.

On this point I must register certain objections in connection with this work. To express it brutally, this film is executed with the pedal pressed down to the floor. The plot demonstrates the knowledge of the period that we already possess and that is commonly known. It is commonly known that criminal investigations were undertaken according to pre-conceived charges, and that trials took place to prove those charges. We have here an example of this, executed in an overdrawn manner, in a way that does not aim to provide a deeper explanation of what has been writ-

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ten on this subject. The film's aspirations have been lowered. It doesn't go in that direction. Rather, it aims to awaken emotions, to affect feelings as much as possible by limiting intellectual content. In this regard, I think that the film does not measure up to its form; it does not equal the artistic craft of the director.

Now, concerning the co-laudation conclusions. I have no doubt that the film should be accepted. As a work, and as a debut. Concerning its public release, however, I agree with Kozniewski that that question should not be decided today. The matter ought to be suspended, and I do not agree with Bryll that we should push it to the screen. This requires serious thought. The film should reach the public some day, but I don't know whether or not now is the appropriate moment. I submit that the film be accepted and that the decision about distribution be put off.

Mieczyslaw Waskowski [*Film director, creator of "Seven Cardinal Sins" and "The Singing and Neighing of the Horses Can Still Be Heard"; first secretary of the Party organization for the film industry; sympathizer of Poreba's Grunwald Patriotic Association*]: I do not wish to enter into polemics, although I honestly feel like arguing with the preceding speakers. It seems to me that the point here is to listen to various voices, because we are an advisory body to the minister, and ultimately he alone, or with his closest advisors, will decide what to do with this film. I would like instead to return to the question of the artistic evaluation of this film.

I would like to remind you that the artistic value of a work depends on the value of the truth told by the director, the truth about the times, about the situation. Material selected in a one-sided manner does not make a work of art. Such a tendentious selection of material serves, well, a certain manipulation by the director to make us look at a certain fragment of history in a particular way.

That the material in this film has been manipulated by the director is beyond doubt, but after hearing Andrzej Wajda's recommendation I see the matter more clearly. Hence, my first recommendation: I submit that a detailed analysis be undertaken to determine who is responsible for approving the screenplay and giving the go-ahead to the production. For this is my first objection: this film simply should never have been made, in the shape in which it was made, and paid for with the state's money. To make a comparison (and even I perhaps regard this comparison as too strong, a little exaggerated): if we showed the Nazi era to a young, contemporary viewer unfamiliar with those times, and we showed it solely through the prism of a concentration camp, then I would also regard that as a mistake. Because the Nazi system and its entire machinery cannot be reduced solely to that dimension, to such a narrow perspective as that of the concentration camps. Nevertheless, I see here only that single dimension; I see only one track. This is the viewing of an epoch through the martyrdom of people accidentally snatched off the street and thrown in the torture chambers of the security police. Of course, such a theme quickly runs away on its own.

I attribute the fact that we were moved by this film not to the artistic skill of the director, but exclusively, I repeat, to a purposeful, very deft manipulation in a certain direction. This is my first objection. I would like to develop it further. Namely, how did it happen that the work on this film was completed even after the state of war was introduced in our country? Who is responsible for allowing this film to be finished? I think that we should have a long talk about this film, but perhaps in somewhat different company.

Finally, I believe that this film is part of a greater whole. This is what caused the unusually sharp struggle in the cultural milieu that is taking place today. It's a trend, and this film, I would say, is a banner, a poster film pushing that struggle onto the screen in a very open, impudent, unheard-of manner. But all of us know about that period, so painful, so complex, so convoluted, because we are of an age where certain things are known from personal experience. In order to get to where the director arrives at on the screen, one would need to show that epoch in

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a very wide context, in the context of very complicated causes, interactions, and correlations. I am surprised that this film does not deal with the mechanisms, so to speak, and with the people who operated them. Why doesn't it point to those people? Obviously, here too we have a certain degree of manipulation. I am not even talking about such a spicy business as the casting of Agnieszka Holland, which has its own, clear meaning.[4]

In short, not only do I wholeheartedly protest against this film, but I downright demand that an inquiry be undertaken into everything we saw today, from the beginning, and that everything be thoroughly examined. This is my only motion. Thank you.

Jerzy Hoffman [*Director of the historical films "The Deluge" and "Sir Wolodyjowski," and of "To the Last Drop of Blood," which is about the formation of the Polish army in the USSR during World War II. Hoffman is the head of the film studio "Zodiak."*]: In the words of the last speaker there was . . . [*the Minister asks for brevity because he will have to leave*] . . . there sounded a kind of threat, the threat of, well, an investigation concerning the origins of this film. I would like to stay with the film. Indeed, that period was extremely complex, and the film performs an autopsy of a certain phenomenon that was an instance of absolute degeneration.

Unfortunately, I must separate two issues here. Comrade Waskowski spoke of pressing down the pedal—it was pressed down very skillfully here, which means that the director knows his craft. His abilities are, for me, beyond discussion. However, this film is boiling with emotions, with passionate hatred. We live in a country where passions have reached their peak, and where hate was lately aroused to a fever pitch. I think about the future of this film with the deepest concern; that is, it doesn't seem to me that it could now be distributed in the theaters. The rest, of course, I leave to the minister.

Czeslaw Petelski [*Director of "Copernicus," "The Base of the Dead," and other films; author of several screenplays; former first secretary of the Party organization for the film industry; former head of the film studio "Iluzjon." Petelski attacked Wajda and Solidarity in an article in "Trybuna Ludu."*]: Let us first of all admit to ourselves that this is not an historical film. It is a contemporary film. We have had films that confronted the past; I am for such critical films. *Man of Marble* was a film that attempted such a settling of accounts. We could debate about that film, but it presented some arguments. There are no arguments here. Here we only have hatred. Hatred not toward what happened in the past, but hatred toward the present. Waskowski is absolutely right: this is a loathsome, disgusting film. We are not talking about an excellent work either. Listen to me: if a director making his debut stands up behind a camera, he must know how to cut and splice. And this director knows how to do that. But even from the artistic point of view this film breaks into two parts. First it is propaganda, then suddenly it becomes melodramatic kitsch. That's the artistic truth about this film. Let's not deceive ourselves that we have been presented with a work of art that for some tactical reasons should not be shown for a while. This is an anti-socialist film, made solely for propagandistic reasons and growing out of an open hatred toward that which is happening today and will be happening tomorrow.

Poreba: I would prefer that a myth is not born in this room. That is, a myth of courageous people who said a lot of truth and a myth of opportunists who took a stand against this film. Everything should be clear from the start. And I would like to say something concerning the "courage" of showing these matters, that is to say, torture, which

4 Agnieszka Holland is an actress and director, and a member of Solidarity. Holland's father, a prominent journalist and Party member in the Stalinist period, was arrested in 1961, when the Gomulka regime turned from liberalization to greater repression. He died in a fall from the window of his apartment while police agents were conducting a search there.

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is—so to speak—a method of forced confessions during investigation. (Frankly, when one reads Kuropieska one sees that more perfidious things were done, but that is not the issue.) I don't think all that much was shown here. There are twenty-seven known methods of interrogation. We know well about the freezing of prisoners, about pulling off fingernails; we know what Mrs. Bristiger did, what Rozanski did, what Romkowski and others did.[5] These are not great discoveries, and my misgivings don't concern them. I simply think that the evil of this film consists in what Mr. Kozniewski expressed.

This film lies from the beginning to the end, and, regrettably, it is a premeditated lie. Young Polish viewers—especially in the last two years—have been cheated from beginning to end about those years. Almost the entire ideology setting Poland afire has been built upon ignorance about those years, upon the oblivion to which this subject has been consigned for the youth. The thing to remember about this film is the fact that Polish youth would learn for the first time about the trials of Tatar, Mossor, Kirchmayer, and others from the lips of Agnieszka Holland. Gentlemen, this is an obscenity. Let her first take a stand with regard to the role her own father played in those times, and to the times themselves. That's number one.

Two. I think this is a fairy tale for well-behaved children. The relations in the Office of Security Police are an invention. If the author had only wanted to exert himself a little and had researched these things, he would have learned that the tragedy of that system lay in a certain puritan atmosphere, in a sort of Jesuitical attitude; it lay also in the situation. I don't know whether Bugajski ever heard of the existence of a special department that spied and checked on police functionaries. A functionary could not allow himself to do too much when his actions weren't directed against the enemy. That's one thing. I have read a lot on this subject. Maybe that's why I have such a reputation among some, because those times are a passion of mine, and the truth about those times is also a passion of mine.

I disagree with this film, with what it shows about the other side. For God's sake, that whore on the screen, what kind of a symbol for the generation of Home Army underground soldiers is she? Pardon me. Is she acceptable because in the end, someplace inside her, humanity awakens? This is a mite too little. I would like to congratulate Bugajski in some way for his ability to work with actors. If I mention Agnieszka Holland it does not mean that she played badly in this film. She acted very well, except that she is consciously lying, as she almost always does.

Really, dear friends, there must be a standard of truth in art's generalizations; it must bind us somehow, especially when we touch on times about which the society, excepting the specialists, knows next to nothing. Let us make films one hundred times more trenchant: I will defend them in this room if a censor or anyone else says that the matter is too sharply depicted. Let's show it sharply, but let's show what was at stake in those times. There was a collision of two world-concepts, of life and of Poland, above all. It must not be a matter concerning just a few individuals who were accidentally entangled in this. In the film, it is black-and-white—for instance, that nicely done professional motif of the security policeman who falls in love with the girl who has shown some toughness. It's all very nice, but how does it relate to what actually took place there? It's really a fairy tale for well-behaved children, a love story from the times of security-police rule.

There's one more thing. It seems to me that this film bears the imprint of something that has been obligatory in our cinematography, something that has been promoted so hard by the critics (those of course who worked for the inflagration of the country): it is the scheme of one magnificent human being who is immersed in a sea of dirt, ugliness, sadism, hideousness. I simply think that this film should be the last burial of a certain style of thinking.

5 Luna Bristiger, Jozef Rozanski, and Roman Romkowski were high Jewish officials at the Ministry of Public Security during the Stalinist period.

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Jan Rybkowski [*Film director*]: Gentlemen, as I walked out after this film I was shaken. I am not young; I have seen various things. And, sitting there, I thought it through once again. Gentlemen, enormous things have accumulated, horrible things that we lived through in our lives, things that create a certain pathology. A whole course of pathological literature has been created, and nobody takes it seriously; but it exists in Germany. There are various sadistic things, pornographic. Didn't you see films in which the SS-men were, uh, entertaining themselves? An unhealthy reflex has been created, a pathology really. Although I appreciate the excellent acting, appreciate the direction, I cannot help feeling that this is pathological. My first job was with Jakubowska on her movie about Auschwitz. I researched it very thoroughly; I was always very interested in that. But let us not include pathological things among Polish matters. This is a certain deviation, created by times of contempt.

Henryk Jankowski [*Professor of philosophy at Warsaw University*]: It seems to me that our commission will only be able to make a recommendation if we do not allow ourselves to be frightened, if everyone can express his opinion. Even the sharpest criticism should not be tied to administrative proposals, because we would soon start to quarrel, or grow afraid of each other, and we wouldn't be able to provide sensible advice to the minister.

There were two appraisals of this film: one that it is an historical film, another that it is contemporary. In my opinion neither one applies to the film we just saw. It is a kind of morality play, showing the state of a few moral attitudes—a pragmatic attitude and a principled attitude. The message of such a morality play considerably exceeds what we know about the period in question from other sources.

I want to say one more thing. This is also a huge piece of our history. Thirty years have passed. Nevertheless, it seems to me that films of this kind are always useful insofar as they influence people's motives, and not in the direction which some of the preceding speakers have indicated. This is not a film that arouses hatred towards socialism, unless we regard those practices that are shown in the film as an integral element of socialism. With such a notion of socialism this film is indeed anti-socialist. But I don't think that those practices were an integral part, that they were helpful to socialist ideas. In short, we condemned those practices. They were stamped out. A film artist cannot show everything in his film.

Andrzej Werner [*Film critic, activist in Solidarity; interned by the martial law authorities and later released*]: I'd like to. . . [*The Minister asks him to leave. He also asks another man to leave. A short argument ensues.*]

Maria Turlejska [*Professor of history*]: I would like to make some remarks as an historian, thus not judging this film as a work of art (although, independently, I regard it highly from an artistic point of view). It seems to me that the decisions of the ninth Party Congress to examine the causes of Poland's crises, the debate around them, and even the attempts to begin analyzing those crises since 1948, heretofore neglected in history, provide a certain point of departure for having them illuminated not only in memoirs, but also in other kinds of works, namely works of art. One of my friends who was arrested in 1948 spent five years in prison without trial. Unfortunately, she could not be here today. She saw this film and was terribly shaken, taking it as a document of an era, a document of those times, historical testimony.

A lot has been said here about emotions, but the essence of the matter lies in the fact that those emotions were stirred by certain cognitive elements. That is, this film—based, incidentally, on consultations with people who had gone through this wringer, through certain methods of investigation, certain methods of forcing confessions, etc.—is an attempt to provide a reflection on that bygone period. I would refer back to Wajda's letter, which treats it as an historical film. I too regard it as an historical film. I think that

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young people, who know so little of Polish history, have been searching for answers about what history's blank spaces really looked like. Well, those young people should have received some information; they were receiving it in any case, so that they could answer the question: What happened?

I think that to break the silence of this kind is necessary and valuable, and it lends credibility to the thesis that today there is no return to those methods and means. I think that from such a point of view, irrespective of the film's artistic values and of the moral values professor Jankowski mentioned, this film has not only emotional worth but also cognitive value. It may defuse, it may provide a catharsis; it may give a proof, a kind of test, that certain things won't be repeated, that there is no return to them. Therefore, I think that the film should be released.

Jozef Lenart [*Writer; first secretary of the Party organization at the Polish Writers' Association, former member of the Central Committee; former editor-in-chief of the magazine "Wspolczesnosc"; deputy editor of "World Literature"*]: I would like to comment on the last sentence of Professor Turlejska, namely that this film may defuse something in the accumulation of society's emotions. I think that this film cannot defuse anything at this moment, it can only electrify further the atmosphere, which in any case is electrified enough already. Is this an historical film, as Mr. Andrzej Wajda claims in his message? It is not, nor is it a contemporary film. It is an abstract film, in relation to the state of knowledge and the social situation in which it was made. It is abstracted from all the historical and contemporary context, purposely, with a great artistic impact.

I agree with some of the points raised by Poreba, that the film is an extension of a certain scene from *Man of Marble*. You will remember in that movie when a man called in by the police enters a room, and afterward it turns out that he is not there anymore. There is a trap-door, isn't there? Bugajski's film shows what happens to a person who walks into that trap. Its intellectual content goes only as far as the lieutenants and soldiers doing service in prison, however; it stops with the props of the uniform and the prison. For this reason it is cognitively sterile. It is very exciting, because it shows the most spectacular part of the process, well, actually the residue of the processes of a political struggle that was waged then. But it does not relate to the mechanism of that political struggle, to the reasons for it. Rather, it does relate to it in a certain way. In what way? There are two issues here that give intellectual direction to the film, and it seems to me that it is a false direction. The scene in which one of the heroines—it was probably an accident that that prisoner was played by Agnieszka Holland—says, "Yes, again it will turn out that the Communists are to blame for everything" is very strong, much stronger than that beautiful scene with the giving of the fir branch.

Nevertheless, this is the emphasis that defines the direction of the film. The same with the meaning-laden, uh, reaction to . . . well, it's a diverse reaction, and interestingly shown, in a way that provides a chance for a deepened perspective on the matter: namely, the reaction in that cell to the news of Stalin's death. Even if this film makes an impression, I think that the means used here, the poverty of the means, is closely related to the intellectual poverty, the poster-like quality of this film, with its emotionally agitating character.

Minister Stefanski: Ladies and gentlemen, if I can request the following. I would like to say a few words, and then ask you to chair the meeting. Everything we say is for the purpose of documentation, in order to make a decision. As usual, the notes being taken are not very detailed. [*A voice from the side: "It's being written down in shorthand."*]

Ultimately, following the discussion, and after I familiarize myself with the rest of the material, obviously, final decisions will be made. This decision formally belongs to me. I think that substantively, to a degree, it also belongs to me. So, just a few sentences for the moment. I know the screenplay; I read it in *The Dialogue*.

Of course the events depicted in the film

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present a certain truth. The film was made in specific political times, but even not going into anything, because the intentions of the authors are hard to read, it was made on the wave of certain political needs still very strongly promoted by certain political milieus in this country, and it follows undoubtedly—although maybe not directly—from certain inspirations. It would have served those inspirations perfectly—it would have served their political realization—had it appeared before December 13.

Fortunately, the film did not make it. Some people were able to finish their works in time; they manifested their political outlook. They took a very political stand on one side. I shall not conceal anything. I trust that I speak here in a gathering of people who are not politically illiterate, who understand well. A morality play was not what was needed then. I wish it were. If there were enough morality in Poland we would probably not have this situation, this state of December 13, and these decisions, right? Unfortunately we did not achieve what was necessary: morality. Political obstinacy, and the ensuing attempts to play various games, to use means that caused social tensions, they were eagerly reached for. This was a grave mistake, starting with those posters with slogans in the shipyard.

This film, I'd like to emphasize, is not a morality play and it is not an historical work. I disagree with professor Turlejska. Why isn't it historical? We simply know that there is a political struggle, what its rules are, what methods are being employed in that struggle. The crux of the matter is, what cause does it serve? If the film truly aimed for that. . . I am not talking about subjective intentions of the authors, for they may be just and honest; I have no right to ascribe anything to them.

This is not an objective film. It clearly makes the image of those times vague, and not just vague but outright false and mendacious, because one can always place a well-chosen fragment of reality under a magnifying glass and make use of such truly cancerous tissue, tissue which should be rejected, of course. It must be rejected. We know those methods and those times; none of us wishes their return. Of course, nothing will ever be explained on the basis of such a monstrous blow-up, without any attempt to justify or prove, as it has been rightly said here, the sources of this phenomenon. One demands that from an historian, and to some degree one demands that from an artist as well, because a film is not an abstraction, it is a realistic work, a verist work, a concrete work. It speaks in a clear language, enhanced by a captivating vision, and added to that is talent.

We have here a work of art, then, positively judged, but it works against the intentions; that is to say, in its reception it evokes, in director Hoffman's apt description, hatred, even if unintentionally. Its presence was particularly felt in the period before December, because we lived through such intensified hatred then. Should we follow that track? I think this would not serve those social goals which I think all of us consider worthy, including the authors, whom I do not accuse of wanting to achieve other purposes. Although I would say that if the wave of certain political tendencies suggested to them the necessity of making such a work, then that was their conscious political decision. Such choices must be unequivocally judged. If not, if this was just a temporary tide of inspiration, it would be quite characteristic. One must say that it has been rather widespread.

Why, then, were the Fifties so eagerly dealt with in the period before December 13? So eagerly! This is an astounding phenomenon! One day psychologists, sociologists, historians will decide this question. Today it is politicians who think about it; others will get their say later. That period, and so monstrously presented, was to be used in a political struggle. One just had to show it in a certain light: Look how the youth were being depraved then! Look at it and see what values the then Union of Polish Youth transmitted!

Were we living in a police state in those times? Were the Seventies, or the years after 1956, the years of police terror? I am not talking about the trials, really. . . Maybe

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some are nostalgic for that, but I think that none of us here are. There was no police state but, nevertheless, that image was being recalled, wasn't it? Attempts were made to prove that this system is by its very nature a police system, a depraved system. It was forgotten in that frenzy that it is not, because it was so suggestively presented to us in some works. This is the essence of tragedy, now that we are speaking of artistic truth, of a morality play. These are perhaps rhetorical questions. I pose them here for the sake of artistic responsibility, a pure responsibility one would like to achieve and to shape in society.

These are just my questions. I would be willing to discuss this film further. I am asking them because it would be worthwhile to think them over, although not at this very moment. There is no use deceiving oneself or avoiding clear words. I do not see a possibility, not only of distributing this film, but also of accepting the ideas contained in it. In any case, I personally cannot accept such an offer because, in principle, I do not agree with looking at those times in such a way—simplified, monstrously shown. I am not talking about the details but about a certain style, a subjective perspective on certain things: the way this film expresses itself.

Does this film serve to learn about certain phenomena in such a way as to rationally and emotionally deter the potential repeaters from going back to those times and mobilizing society around such a stand? Is mobilization in this regard socially justified? I would rather not give a future-oriented answer to this question. But I think not. This film does not serve social peace or knowledge, that is, the lessons that one should draw from history. I do not want to employ circumlocutions. Please write down what is being said.

I also wouldn't want to close the discussion with my remarks, because I think it should continue. Not only here. It can even be moved beyond this room. It is necessary. It is needed not just to evaluate this film, but maybe also to evaluate what we should be doing, including films at the stage of screenplay and literary development. That is, these discussions should aim at that wider opinion. It is easy to deal with it by administrative means, but that's not the point. I have in mind, rather, the elimination of screenplays—the point being that these things should be more mature, wiser, deeper, and, of course, more morally responsible. I would end on that. I'd like you to chair the meeting. I must, unfortunately, as I said, leave.

Marian Kuszewski [*Director of the Central Administration of Cinematography, that is, second in command after Minister Stefanski; former president of the Higher Film School in Lodz*]: Undoubtedly, art is a field of human activity in which errors occur. Even with the best of intentions, a person does not always succeed in attaining a set goal in a proper way, so that it will bring satisfaction later on. Therefore, let us say, we should have some kind of considerable tolerance toward errors and mistakes. Errors are unavoidable.

Nevertheless, if from such a point of view I would tend to absolve this film, still, I was greatly surprised by Mr. Wajda's letter; he is a prominent artist, after all, a head of a studio, who enjoys great authority, who actually attempts to justify this mistake. Here I agree with the Minister. Any talk about morality play is here an exaggeration. The film is one-sided to the point of offending artistic dignity. It seems to me that the artist has no right to operate this way if he pretends to the prestige of his calling. And the film is so simplified and tendentious.

In conclusion, we were talking about the conditions of distributing this film. A few days ago a young man was knifed to death in Warsaw. Most likely political motives were involved. I am talking about the young Ladosz, the son of professor Ladosz, whom I knew personally. A nice young man. He was an activist in the Communist Union of Polish Youth. Not long ago we talked about the Karos affair.[6] There was a priest involved

6 A policeman shot to death in a Warsaw streetcar in February 1982. Seven youths and a priest accused of helping them were tried for the murder and sentenced to long prison terms in September.

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there. There is the matter of moral responsibility for stirring hatred which leads to murder.

Zaorski: What I know of one artist has scared me terribly here. Those cannons, those culverins that have been rolled out against this film. I understand that the film had an emotional effect and maybe that is why we started to feel as if we were, well, not in the building of the Ministry of Culture.

I think that our task here is to talk. Horrible accusations were made concerning one-sidedness, poster-like qualities, etc. From a story of a woman who gets into a wringer by accident, into this machinery, suddenly generalizations have been made. They are, in my judgment, far from the target, and I think harmful, because this is already forcing things to a "no."

Concerning what Minister Stefanski said toward the end, that all these discussions serve a purpose, namely that new screenplays and new films should be made, one should perhaps ponder the fact that only in normal conditions is it possible to convince anyone, to move a conscience. This here immediately causes that atavistic reflex for a "no."

Ryszard Bugajski [*Director of "The Interrogation"*]: Ladies and gentlemen, in the end the director has his say. I feel I have a duty to speak, but it would be hard for me to enter into polemics with what I have heard here. I have a heavy heart because I can't resign myself to so many baseless arguments. I have never heard such things before and would have to contest them sentence by sentence, and such discussion would last too long. I don't know, but I suppose that those gentlemen who used so many epithets today, "anti-socialist" and so on, should justify themselves. Why, in their opinion, is it anti-socialist? What does it mean anyway? But that's precisely the point I do not wish to discuss.

I wanted to express surprise. How can one talk so much about politics, educational impact, etc., in a place—as Janusz Zaorski rightly noted—such as the Ministry of Culture, not the propaganda ministry or a center of political decision-making? You said that somebody was murdered with a knife. We, however, are not sitting now in a police station in order to listen to reports of accidents, or some kind of a criminal blotter.

I am also surprised that when Professor Jankowski, who is an authority on ethics, and has been for many years—in old times I used to be his student and remember his lectures and his books—says that this is a morality play then somebody else says: "No, this is not a morality play." It seems to me that the discussion, this bidding up of the terminology, is absurd. If for an expert on ethics this is a morality play, one should, in my opinion, believe him. One should also believe the historians who say, for example, that for them this film is historically true. To deny that it is an historical film, or that it is true, well, in that case, what do we know anything for, why do we have certain knowledge, why are we experts in our fields, if anyone can deny it?

You emphasized all this time—I mean the people who criticized the film—that this is not a film that should be shown because it could stir some inappropriate emotions. You claimed that this is a film—there were some epithets here—that is "loathsome" and at the same time contemporary, "anti-socialist," "propagandistic," "manipulative," etc. Mr. Jankowski said the security-police practices do not constitute an integral part of socialism. But it's as if you emphasized at the same time that security-police practices do constitute an integral part of socialism. Because if they do not, for God's sake, let's condemn them! Let's see whether this is true or not, but let's not relate it to the present!

Of course, every country has its history that lives on. We can talk today about the January uprising of 1863, the November uprising of 1830: their strong traditions survive until today. But to make a film about the November uprising does not mean that one is making a contemporary film. Never. And showing General Zajaczek, or, let's say, General Krasinski does not mean that the attitudes they represented exist today, and that we should be disputing them today. Really, the discussion with people who stuck various

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ideological labels on the film is rather funny.

If the film—and most people admitted it—is moving, if it has caused people to walk out after the screening shocked and moved, and even crying (and I saw it myself here), then why don't we look at this film as a certain kind of artistic event, to be judged by the public? After all, the public usually decides whether a film is appropriate or not. The public can evaluate because it will buy a ticket or it won't. Let's not be wiser than the public; let's not pretend that we know better than they whether to show it or not because they are small powerless people who do not know anything, who can't judge what's good.

I think it is grossly presumptuous to say that I, Ryszard Bugajski, or somebody else, say, Mr. X, may decide, for example, that five million people, or even five thousand people, are in error, and that those five thousand should not be seeing this film. Let's present this film to the public to evaluate it. I would like to propose here a trial run that would help us decide; let's show this film to people from various walks of life: workers, intelligentsia, clerks, the young and the old. Let's try it! That would be some kind of an evaluation I could accept. If these people reject the film, then I would say, indeed, I was mistaken.

Making a decision *a priori*—some thirty years of history should have taught us that making the decision *today,* that not showing it because it might cause some kind of incalculable social consequences—well, we have condemned that many times. There was breast-beating on this account, again and again. That is all. Rather, I do not know whether I should add anything.

Poreba: I have one request to make. In general I would like to explain something to Mr. Bugajski. Simply, it seems to me that this point of view which you present to us is nothing but an expression of vanity and irresponsibility with regard to a work of art, and that's all. However, I'd like to tell you that we, here, are simply people who constitute an advisory body; we do not pre-judge anything here. Every one of us makes comments according to our conscience, our point of view, our understanding of the world and of art. I do not see any reason for having to listen to your insulting epithets when I come here for socially motivated purposes. Straight out, in the name of everyone here, we won't stand for this. So, either you take this under advisement or you don't. Besides, your arguments are also very manipulative. You invoke one historian who is sitting here, and who by the way surprised me *very* much, because she told us only, on the subject of one of the most painful chapters in Polish history, that she had a friend, correct? That is not the most authoritative remark on the subject for me. [*A voice from the side: "There are books, there are books."*] Because I could invite ten other historians here who will have an absolutely different point of view, and only then could we discuss it somehow. Maybe we should have invited the historians of contemporary Poland, huh?

Bugajski: I agree entirely. [*From the side: "Mr. Bohdan, why don't you first arrange that this lady's books are allowed to be published?"*]

Poreba: We demonstrated this on film. You may accept it or not, but do not adopt this tone of voice when you address people working voluntarily. [*A voice: "Well, you do get a few zlotys for this, don't you?"*] Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much, I would like to propose . . .

Petelski: Wait! Wait a moment! This is not the end already, is it? Why are you taking my turn away?

Chair: Please don't shout. We did not come here to shout at each other but to discuss. Please go on.

Petelski: Well, very well, I will answer. I am not surprised by Mr. Bugajski's arrogance. However, I am very surprised by the remarks of Mr. Zaorski, the director of the studio, who started to instruct us where we are not. That we are not in the propaganda bureau,

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that we are not at the police station. Neither are we in the offices of Solidarity's Mazowsze Region Headquarters. Fellows, I won't stand for that . . .

Bugajski: I said that, not Mr. Zaorski. You direct your remarks to me.

Petelski: You both said that.

Golebiowski [*University professor, former official of the Central Committee's Youth Department*]: If I can . . . I am sorry, I wasn't supposed to say anything, but I am here for the first time. With permission of the Minister, my name's Golebiowski, from the University of Warsaw. I would like to say one thing, address one point, in order to calm the emotions. It seems to me that Mr. Bugajski, when he talked about how the film should be tested among various publics, is largely right. We are aware of this, and that is also my opinion as a sociologist of culture.

Well, we had an obvious example of art today, cinematic art, that cannot, in this situation, be released right away, as it was proposed here. This film is *so* shocking, and the context is *so* strong, so strongly tied to the present, independent of the intentions of its creators. I will remind you of one thing: a mass audience, even though. . . Please, do not misunderstand me. . . Not that I do not appreciate its level of education, its knowledge of history, independent of certain mistakes that were committed—a mass audience will react to this film unequivocally as, how shall I say, the breaking of human beings by people in Polish uniforms. That's how it will be received! Unfortunately, that's how it will be received, irrespective of intentions, independent of them. The breaking of human beings that took place in the context of history, which is incomprehensible to the masses. But we can understand it, provided that we are deeply convinced that this was happening in the name of socialism. They would not make distinctions between Stalinist non-socialism and the socialism of the state of war. Of course they won't! As a sociologist I can responsibly say this without sticking any labels on the film, even though it seems to me that these voices that spoke of historicism, moral tales, etc., were somewhat one-sided, and that my esteemed fellow scientists—I am sorry if this sounds bad—look at it too much from their professional point of view. If I were to look at the picture from my point of view, as a sociologist, a film that has emotional effect, that contains certain emotions, is a propaganda film. Independent of the intentions. Unfortunately. Thank you.

[*The tape recording stops at this point.*]

Postscript: "Solidarnosc—Tygodnik Mazowsze," the underground weekly published by the Warsaw chapter of Solidarity, printed in its June 23, 1982 issue the following excerpts from an open letter, dated May 12, to Deputy Minister of Culture S. Stefanski from Andrzej Wajda in response to the April 23 co-laudation commission meeting.

I have read the transcript of co-laudation and I must say that we have not encountered anything as dangerous [as this] in a long time. The majority of the participants in the discussion have proved that they have no qualifications to sit on a commission of this kind. They do not possess the necessary competence to judge a film from an artistic point of view, hence they are exclusively occupied with its political evaluation. . . .

I shall deal only with three voices: the directors Waskowski, Petelski, and Poreba. Waskowski says, among other things: "This film should have never been made and paid for with our money." Mr. Waskowski, surely this was not your money since it was precisely my films that earned money for [Polish] cinematography. . . . You forget that you and your friends shoot films on the stock bought with dollars from the sales of my films, films which you attack today. You call for a public prosecutor. I submit that the prosecutor should inquire into the matter of ten screenplays of yours (I participated in the hearings of the Cultural Commission of the Sejm [Parliament] when an official of the Supreme Control Chamber spoke about this matter),

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for which you took the money, but have never made the films. . . .

Mr. Petelski denigrates the value of Bugajski's film by saying that it consists in the fact that the director knows how to cut and splice. If Mr. Petelski could "cut and splice" as well as debutant Bugajski, probably most of his complexes would not have haunted the filmmakers' milieu for so many years. . . .

Like Poreba, I am of the opinion that dramatic moments in our history ought to be shown through to the end. . . .

When I was accidentally stopped and interrogated in Cracow's Freedom Square in 1945, the language heard in that building was indeed foreign, but it wasn't Yiddish. If this fact had found true reflection in Poreba's film about those times, we would be truly grateful to him for such a film. . . .

Anybody who can't see in *The Interrogation* an astounding film debut has no right to judge films at all, or to be a member of a commission whose purpose it is to issue such judgments. . . .

I am afraid that all the evil which exists in the present co-laudation commission will be multiplied in another body which you have created: the screenplay commission. I regard the creation of a commission of this kind as a retreat to the dismal Fifties. . . .

So long as the suspension of the Association of Polish Filmmakers is not lifted, the creation of new advisory bodies without any consultations with filmmakers should not take place. Such a body cannot represent anyone, or be accepted by the film world.

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Modern painting and "reality"

by Jed Perl

It has become fashionable to say that painters are returning to realism. Such talk is almost always accompanied by skeptical remarks about difficult or obscure art and observations on the bankruptcy of the avant-garde. Some have said that we are at a turning point in the history of modern painting—and of modernism itself: that the very foundations of modern art are being shaken. Last June, *Newsweek* ran a cover story on the subject under the headline, "Art Imitates Life: The Revival of Realism." The *Newsweek* article reproduced paintings by Lennart Anderson, William Bailey, Jack Beal, Rackstraw Downes, Jane Freilicher, Gregory Gillespie, and Philip Pearlstein, among others, and explained that "with the waning of modernism, painters who paint pictures of the real world are back in favor."

It is true that realism is "back in favor," at least to some extent. But many of the claims that are being made for the "new realism" belong more to the history of publicity than to the history of art, and they mask a fundamentally shortsighted vision. Modern painting has had a rich and complex relation with observed reality, and the realism of the present raises few questions not raised at various times since the beginning of Cubism.

Modern painting—painting since Impressionism—has embraced a great many different and divergent visions. Nature has been recorded, transformed, turned upside down, rejected. The artist has been a free spirit, a sensibility; or a system-builder, a scientist of a new pictorial world. Like any period in art, the past hundred years have not been solid and homogeneous, but porous and heterogeneous. Of course, there are certain tendencies that characterize much modern painting. The rejection of chiaroscuro in favor of pure hue is shared by artists of very different sensibilities, and each modern painter has had to deal with the revolutions of late Cézanne and analytical Cubism, which overturned the Renaissance view of painting as a window-on-the-world. But no one key will unlock all the structural inventions of modern painting, and it may well be that what unites all modern painting is not a matter of structure, but a matter of the artist's—and the painting's—relation to the world.

Modern painting was born in the nineteenth century out of dramatic changes in the situation of the artist in society. Baudelaire's *Salons* are the essential texts of the mid-nineteenth-century art world, for they signal the unbridgeable gap that was beginning to develop between the true artist and philistine mass taste. For Baudelaire, imagination was both the artist's most precious resource and the thing that the public found it most difficult to comprehend. While the public was succumbing to a calcified idea of artistic finish and a superficial naturalism, the true artist was using his imagination to invent, to take art into realms where the public would find it nearly impossible to follow. Baudelaire's assertion, in the *Salon of 1859,* that "the whole

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visible universe is but a storehouse of images and signs to which the imagination will give a relative place and value" suggests the outlines of an abstract art.

Whatever the reasons for the artist's increasing isolation from established taste and criteria, by the end of the nineteenth century the artist was no longer speaking *for* society. Art continued to comment on society, but the artist was now working, first and foremost, for himself, and his work was reaching the public, if at all, through a new network of private galleries. The solitary character of the artist's search and the indifference and skepticism of the public seem to have fed upon each other. By the beginning of the twentieth century, artists felt that the pain born of misapprehension and rejection was inherent in their vocation—and might even help them achieve a kind of grace. Artists turned from large-scale canvases, official and prescribed subjects, and decorative and occasional works that fit easily within the patterns of middle- and upper-class life to subjects of private import and new, radical styles of decoration. Serious artists came to feel that they were seeing things in the world that had not been seen before. They spoke of the authenticity, the singularity of their perceptions, and claimed that through their paintings they were disclosing new realities.

All modern painting reflects an extreme inwardness. The picture does not derive from a shared vision, but from an artist's wish to inscribe the fable of a private life and spirit on the public canvas. In some respects abstract painting is the most radical outgrowth of this modern approach to art. It offers alternative worlds which have their own, self-contained laws and logic. The viewer brings to abstract paintings his experience of *our* world, and leaves them with his consciousness enlarged. But abstract painting is only one expression of the modern inwardness and introversion.

It is often said that modern painting rejects the real world. But if by the real world we mean those things that we see around us, this can hardly be so. Many of the greatest modernists based all their work on their perceptions of things around them. Picasso's statements on this subject are famous. "One cannot go against nature. It is stronger than the strongest man. It is pretty much to our interest to be on good terms with it! We may allow ourselves certain liberties, but only in details." When the American dealer Sam Kootz, who pioneered the exhibition of some of the Abstract Expressionists, went to Paris to buy paintings from Picasso just after World War II, he is said to have murmured to the photographer Brassaï, who was present in Picasso's studio at the time, "It isn't abstract enough!" In Europe, the fact that Picasso's art was based, more often than not, on the figure has been accepted, but in America there seems discomfort with the idea. Perhaps this is why Americans have not warmed to the work of Picasso's last decade. If one believes that modern painting must tend toward abstraction, it is surely troubling to find that one of the men who took art, in Cubism, to the brink of nonobjectivity ended his career painting hieratic figures in a style that evokes the fleeting effects of late Rembrandt and late Titian.

In the case of Matisse, as in the case of Picasso, curators and critics have edited the career in order to give the impression that the artist was less interested in reality than he really was. The very abbreviated style of the World War I period and the nearly abstract forms of the late, colored-paper collages—so well represented in American museums—are but two aspects of Matisse's *oeuvre,* which also includes some of the most penetrating observations of specific places and the human form to be found in painting. Some recent figure painters have attacked modernism for its ignorance of the human form. This is a bizarre charge, easily put to rest by some Matisse lithographs of the 1920s that reveal a grasp of anatomy-as-complex-structure that rivals Raphael's.

If Picasso and Matisse—and Bonnard, Braque, and others—were so very concerned with things seen, why is it that their work has so often been interpreted as a rejection of observed reality? To answer this question we must consider what we assume reality to be in

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relation to art. Realism is the word that is usually used to describe art that displays a loyalty to appearances, and there is, surely, something that rings false about calling most modern painters realists. As a style and a world view realism is inextricably intertwined with the kind of nineteenth-century painting that represented modern life in a new, direct way. Realism as defined by the art of Courbet, Corot, and Millet is finished, of course. But out of the most debased forms of nineteenth-century realism, and, as well, out of photography, another nineteenth-century invention, there developed an increasingly rigid conception of how a picture might represent reality. It was this diseased realism that the modernists attacked, by introducing new, intensely felt impressions into painting. For many modern painters the question was not how to get rid of reality, but how to make it newly, intensely real.

One of the things that is most often—and quite correctly—observed about Picasso, Matisse, and Bonnard, among others, is that they broke down all preconceptions about the level of reduction, simplification, and abstraction that might be imposed on the things around them. The possibility of a high degree of abstraction was always present in their work. But, by the same token—and this is what is so rarely recognized—they always left open the possibility of putting into the picture *more* of what they saw in the world. Modernism has felt the pressures of both abstraction and representation.

And yet some modern painters have been damned because their private journeys led, ultimately, in the direction of a greater representation. This is the case with Edouard Vuillard. Vuillard's early paintings of interiors, with their densely packed compositions and flat, interlocked patterns, have always been admired for their heavy, *fin-de-siècle* poetry and incipient abstraction. Vuillard painted similar rooms for the rest of his life, but after World War I he began to increase the level of complication and elaboration within them so that, by the 1930s, each object in a room registered as a discrete volume in space with its own characteristics and personality.

Two basic complaints have been made against Vuillard's later paintings. First, that by heightening the focus on individual objects Vuillard changed his poetic vision into a prosaic one. Second, that by spending so much time on portraits of particular individuals in particular interiors he became, finally, a conventional portraitist. Both charges seem to me based, not on the evidence of the work, but on an idea that, ipso facto, a twentieth-century artist who heightens his allegiance to representation abdicates any power to synthesize or conceptualize. Taken on their own terms, Vuillard's later paintings are every bit as adventurous as his earlier ones. Vuillard's idea of painting portraits that show people in the environments in which they live and work is utterly original. I can think of no other artist who thought to paint a dentist in his operating room, a fashion designer amidst the clutter of her elegant office, or who cared so intensely about the special qualities that bound people to their environments. Vuillard's later paintings are not often to be found in the more prominent museums and galleries, but anyone who takes the trouble, while in Paris, to go out to the old Palais de Tokyo and look at them will find in these canvases a poetry that, although incompatible with cliché definitions of *the modern,* is absolutely authentic to our age.

If Vuillard became more deeply involved with representation, other artists have moved in the other direction, proceeding toward an increased abstraction. This is the case with Balthus, whose first mature works, painted during the 1930s, were based on a close study of the methods of Courbet. These paintings played on the incipient surrealism in nineteenth-century naturalism and made use of a dark, tonal palette and deep chiaroscuro. Picasso was impressed by them, and actually owned one, the *Children* (1937). Perhaps it was his persistent fascination with the simplification and flattening out of forms in the paintings of Bonnard, with whom Balthus had studied when very young, that brought this first phase of Balthus's career to an end in the late 1940s. Balthus began then to compose more in the plane than in depth, and

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to adopt a high-keyed palette that owed something to the Quattrocento as well as to the moderns. Balthus's increasing interest in pre-Renaissance, non-Western, and modern spatial ideas culminated in the two paintings of Japanese nudes that were first seen in his unforgettable 1977 show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. In these terse, densely packed masterpieces, the man who had argued the modernity of Courbet seemed far closer to the late style of Braque.

Vuillard and Balthus are only two examples of the complex and shifting relations that modern artists have had with reality. Braque, de Chirico, Derain, Dufy, Giacometti, Gris, Helion, Léger, Masson, Matisse, Monet, Morandi, Picasso, and de Staël have all experimented in many directions, the extent to which their work mirrors the world being a choice subject to change and modification, both within a single work and over the entire range of the career. In all cases the success of the work rests on the plastic and poetic authenticity of the final synthesis, not on some fixed idea of how abstract or representational a painting ought to be.

Viewed in the widest context of Franco-American art in the last fifty years, there simply is no return to reality. It has always been here. To say this is not to devalue the good and great representational paintings that are being painted right now. Though post-war American criticism has sometimes given the impression that great art can only be created upon the tidal wave of an artistic revolution, much important art has been created in times and places of artistic and aesthetic stability. Most of the recent pronouncements about the end of modernism, whether made in the name of a benign "pluralism" or a newfangled "postmodernism," seem to suggest a fundamental devaluation of modernism itself. When I told an artist who has been painting representational pictures for fifty years that I was working on an article on the idea that representation was an integral part of modernism he said, "But that's obvious." Maybe it is. If it isn't, it ought to be. Rather than proclaim the premature end of the greatest artistic revolution of our time, we ought to be delighted at the continued viability of this vast transformation in human consciousness. The modernism that gave birth to Cézanne's Provence, Picasso's demons, Matisse's odalisques, Balthus's card-players, Braque's birds, Giacometti's spectral figures, and Morandi's bottles, as well as to so many masterpieces of abstraction, remains vital, alive.

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Eros in Terre Haute: T.S. Eliot's "Lune de Miel"

by William Arrowsmith

The man who disbelieves in any future life whatever is also a believer in Hell. For in this life one makes, now and then, important decisions; or at least allows circumstances to decide; and some of these decisions are such as have consequences for all the rest of our mortal life. Some people find themselves consequently in circumstances such that the whole *of their mortal life* must *be a torment to them. And if there is no future life, then Hell is, for such people, here and now.*

—T.S. Eliot, from a letter to Paul Elmer More, August 10, 1932

Guillaume: At our last meeting of the College Moot, after a rather lively discussion of Eliot's "Sweeney Erect," we decided to spend this evening looking at one of Eliot's four French poems, "Lune de Miel." Our purpose was to validate—or invalidate—Eliot's account of the traditional poet as applied to his own poetry in the period 1915-22. *If,* we supposed, Eliot seriously practiced what he declared in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919); *if* it's true that the poet gifted with "the historical sense" writes "with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer . . . has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order"; *if* the mind of Europe is truly "a mind which changes . . . which abandons nothing *en route*"; *if* the traditional poet writes with the whole Western tradition flowing into his fingertips—*then* everything he writes ought to provide evidence of the galvanizing presence of that tradition. We chose "Lune de Miel" as a proving ground for the simple reason that there's no real critical investment in Eliot's French poems—a decided advantage for us, given our interest in reading Eliot with fresh eyes, from our different disciplinary perspectives. The task assigned me was to lead off by attempting to place "Lune de Miel" in the frame of Eliot's own poetic development and in relation to French poetry generally.

We might best begin with Eliot's own account of his French poems, all written in 1917-18. Years later he remarked of them:

> That was a very curious thing which I can't altogether explain. At that period I thought I'd dried up completely. . . . I started writing a few things in French and found I *could* at that period. I think it was when I was writing in French I didn't take the poem so seriously, and that, not taking them seriously, I wasn't so worried about not being able to write. I did these things as a sort of *tour de force* to see what I could do.

In 1917, he wrote to his mother about these poems and other things:

> . . . I have felt more creative lately. Besides my lectures, which are now on Ruskin and involve some reading in political economy and considerable reviewing (mostly anthropology and biology lately), I have been doing some writing—mostly in French, curiously enough it has taken me that way.

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So at the time of their composition Eliot regarded these French poems as creative work of a sort. To cope with his own poetic drought, he turned to writing poems in French as another poet might have turned to translation. Their persistent inclusion in the *Collected Poems* suggests that Eliot thought well of them; inferior poems he regularly suppressed. He *could* write poetry in French because, in a reputational sense, it didn't "count"; and he could experiment freely, without English inhibitions. Only in this sense, I think, are these poems not to be taken seriously.

As experiments these French poems were both serious and fruitful. It was above all in them, I believe, that Eliot first worked out the austere "caricatures" of the quatrain poems—"Sweeney among the Nightingales," "A Cooking Egg," and "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," for example—as well as the densely allusive texture that connects the quatrains to "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land." Here, in short, is the genesis of that poetry whose rationale was to be expounded in "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

Large claims. Except for "Dans le Restaurant," the French poems have usually been dismissed as five-finger exercises, apprentice stuff unworthy of critical scrutiny, or as the poet's homage to those French poets—Laforgue, Corbière, Gautier—who most influenced him. If so, the homage seems oddly grudging; at least no critic, however Francophile, has managed to detect any profound thematic or philosophical influence by French poets on these poems. But *poetically*—technically and tonally—Eliot's debt to French poetry is great and also gratefully acknowledged.

"Lune de Miel" may well be a "poem in French" rather than a French poem. I can't say. But it's not apprentice stuff. I'd call it a professionally crafted poem, stamped with the author's own underivative point of view. I mean, there's nothing like it in French poetry—or in English poetry either.

What's needed now is the poem, which I'll read to you as responsibly as I can:

Ils ont vu les Pays-Bas, ils rentrent à Terre Haute;
Mais une nuit d'été, les voici à Ravenne,
A l'aise entre deux draps, chez deux centaines de punaises;
La sueur aestivale, et une forte odeur de chienne.
Ils restent sur le dos, écartant les genoux
De quatre jambes molles tout gonflées de morsures.
On relève le drap pour mieux égratigner.
Moins d'une lieue d'ici est Saint Apollinaire
En Classe, basilique connue des amateurs
De chapitaux d'acanthe que tournoie le vent.

Ils vont prendre le train de huit heures
Prolonger leurs misères de Padoue à Milan
Où se trouvent la Cène, et un restaurant pas cher.
Lui pense aux pourboires, et rédige son bilan.
Ils auront vu la Suisse, et traversé la France.
Et Saint Apollinaire, raide et ascétique,
Vieille usine désaffectée de Dieu, tient encore
Dans ses pierres écroulantes la forme précise de Byzance.

[They've seen the Low Countries, they're going home to Terre Haute;
But one summer night, here they are at Ravenna,
Sprawled between two sheets among two hundred bedbugs;
The summer sweat, and a strong reek of bitch.
They stay on their backs, spreading the knees
Of four soft limbs all swollen with bites.
The sheet is lifted in order to scratch better.
Less than a league away is Saint Apollinaire
En Classe, basilica well known to lovers
Of acanthus capitals swirled by the wind.

They're going to take the eight o'clock train
To prolong their miseries from Padua to Milan
Where the Last Supper's located, and a cheap restaurant.
He thinks of the tips, and tots up his expenses.
They will have seen Switzerland and crossed France,
And Saint Apollinaire, rigid and ascetic,
Old factory deconsecrated of God, still holds
In its crumbling stones the precise form of Byzantium.]

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Eighteen lines of very free alexandrines, sometimes deliberately improper, combining both the mute and sounded *e*. Metrically problematic, but full of prosodic surprises. Except for the enjambments at lines eight and nine and lines seventeen and eighteen, the lines are decorously end-stopped, the caesuras mostly falling, according to classical precedent, after the sixth syllable. If we didn't know the poet was Eliot, we'd probably assume it was a French writer, circa 1900, who started out imitating classical and Romantic models, and then, following Verlaine and the Symbolists, mastered the colloquial alexandrine with its shifting mute *e* and rejection of regular rhyme for intricate assonance, off-rhyme, and varied metrical emphasis. We'd sense the influence of Corbière and Gautier in the ironic detachment and pervasive musical wit—those assonances that link Apollin*aire* with amat*eurs,* mors*ures,* h*eures,* and mis*ères*; which yoke *Suisse* to *ascetique, Ravenne* to *chienne,* and so on. We'd also note the way in which the sentence period is played against the line, but especially at lines eight through ten; and the deftness with which the mostly four-beat line is worked now with, now against, the twelve-syllable alexandrine. The third line, for instance, metrically enacts the initial *A l'aise*; the verse, like the couple, *sprawls*; and this musical détente is set against the stony rigidity of the saint in the second stanza. The sixth line, with its five beats and ten syllables, and the thudding of those three hard beats at the beginning—*quatre jambes molles*—metrically suggests the uncoupling it describes. Syntax and sequence are one. The single "beast with two backs" dissolves into two bodies; these in turn fragment into knees and multiplying legs, the flesh subsiding, then swelling again, *tout gonflées de morsures*—those bites which I take to be an image of the recurrent itch stinging these sleepless lovers. Whether in bed or *en route,* they are restless—itching, scratching, "on the go." We can, if we like, cluck with the critics who complain of the poet's squeamishness and the general sordor. More to the point, we can ask why Eliot lavishes such musical intelligence on the misery of these honeymooners.

Look, for instance, at those two enjambed lines—eight and nine—just before the close of the first stanza. Common sense tells us that if a skillful poet breaks his pattern—end-stopped alexandrines—he does so for good reason. Why?

Ayres: Emphasis and modulation, I suppose. At least I found myself admiring the leisureliness with which the poem modulates from the honeymooning lovers to the *amateurs de chapitaux* and thence to the epiphany of the wind rounding off the period. At first glance, line eight looks end-stopped, as though the lovers were familiar with the basilica. But *amateurs* is enjambed, and the effect is to deny the familiarity while expanding the reference of *amateurs* and revealing a very different set of "lovers"—the aesthetes, or perhaps art historians, admiring the capitals.

Amateurs is pivotal, we have to re-read. Re-reading, we see that these "lovers" differ from, but also resemble, each other. Sexual passion and aesthetic passion have different objects, but they're both *passions.* And that passion, whether erotic or aesthetic, is thematic. The aesthetes' passion for their acanthus-capitals is thematically linked to the honeymooners' passion for each other, as well as to their projected pilgrimage to Milan to see the Last Supper. The Last Supper, I mean, suggests still another Passion, doesn't it?

So by introducing the aesthetes as he does, Eliot can modulate toward his real poetic goal, the epiphany of the wind in the stone leaves. No sooner do the aesthetes appear than the poet abandons them for the lovely image of the wind-drifted acanthus columns. The sentence *seems* to move gropingly toward its culmination in the wind, the appearance of which pointedly coincides with the close of the line, period, and stanza. Musically, the point couldn't be more forcefully made. But syntactically that epiphany is almost accidental, a subclause casually trailing away. The effect is to render the epiphany tenuous. Nobody sees it, only the reader.

Saettaro: Right. And the tenuousness is subtly reinforced, isn't it, by the *vont* that begins the second stanza, ironically echoing

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vent. Vent/vont. The honeymooners, a league away, are quite unaware of the wind. Then, come morning, they're off again, restlessly moving on. The Spirit makes its glancing appearance, but its potential witnesses depart. As for the aesthetes, it's the craftsmanship of the capitals they love, not the wind ensouling the stone leaves. At least that's what I hear in the unwinding syntax of the last line of the stanza, which detaches the wind from oblivious eyes and gives it a life of its own.

II

Butz: I wonder if our discussion wouldn't profit from a discrete dose of fact. Who *are* these *amateurs de chapitaux d'acanthe*? Well, Eliot tells us. In his usual way, with an allusion. But detective pride aside, I think that something's gained if we know that Eliot's echoing—in fact, directly quoting—Ruskin, surely the Casanova of all *amateurs de chapitaux*. It was Ruskin on whom Eliot was lecturing when he wrote the French poems. The syllabus for those Yorkshire lectures included not only *Unto This Last* and *Lectures on Art* but *The Stones of Venice*. And it's there, in the soaring evocation of St. Mark's, that Ruskin describes the basilica as an architectural Earthly Paradise:

> . . . sculpture fantastic and involved, of palm leaves and lilies, and grapes and pomegranates, and birds clinging and fluttering among the branches, all twined together into an endless network of buds and plumes; and, in the midst of it, the solemn forms of angels. . . their figures indistinct among the gleaming of the golden ground through the leaves beside them, interrupted and dim, like the morning light as it faded back among the branches of Eden, when first its gates were angel-guarded long ago. And around the walls of the porches there are set pillars of variegated stones . . . their capitals rich with interwoven tracery, rooted knots of herbage, and *drifting leaves of acanthus* and vine.

Later, Ruskin invites his readers to inspect his reproductions and to note in particular:

> . . . *the leaves drifted, as it were, by a whirlwind round the capital by which they rise*. . . all outlined by grand and simple curves . . . the whole of their minute fretwork and thistlework is cast into a gigantic mould which subdues all their multitudinous points and foldings to its own inevitable dominion. And the fact is, that in. . . these Byzantine sculptures we obtain . . . for the first time in the history of art, the germ of that *unity of perfect ease in every separate part, with perfect subjection to an enclosing form or directing impulse*.

So Ruskin gives us not only the image of the wind-drifted leaves, but the idea of a Byzantium whose *forme précise* subordinates its particulars to its own architectonic design. Throughout his life Ruskin was drawn to the spirals and volutes of acanthus, thistle, and thorn. What he took their meaning to be, beyond "the idea of life," he never quite explains. Eliot's allusion to Ruskin seems undeniable, yet I can't quite see why it's there.

Ayres: But the point's surely Ruskin's aestheticism, isn't it? Ruskin exemplifies the aesthetic passion of the *amateurs de chapitaux*—in Eliot's work a persistent theme. The honeymooners and aesthetes "doing Europe" and "taking in" Leonardo's Last Supper are after all cut from the same cloth as the women who "come and go/Talking of Michelangelo" or "Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians." Eliot's point is the modern confusion between the different domains of man's spiritual life, what F.H. Bradley called "degrees of truth or reality." Again and again Eliot condemns the confusion, above all in the work of Arnold, Pater, and Ruskin.

> When religion is in a flourishing state, when the whole mind of society is moderately healthy and in order, there is an easy and natural association between religion and art. Only when religion has been partly retired and confined, when an Arnold can remind us that Culture is wider than Religion, do we get "religious art" and in due course "esthetic religion."

In this confusion of art and religion, honeymooners and Ruskinian aesthetes merge.

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But if the lovers know nothing of Saint Apollinaire, they're at least on their way toward the Last Supper, which, in their secular fashion, they'll enact in a *restaurant pas cher*. For all their groping misery, they're *alive, en route* but also *en acte*. By contrast, the aesthetes are suspended in their arty Limbo, passive observers like the younger Ruskin, never having lived at all.

Caricature tourists the honeymooners may be, but the purpose of the poem, I'm convinced, is to interrogate that caricature and qualify it with the pain of real experience.

Butz: The aesthetes *study* the spines of the acanthus. The honeymooners *feel* them. Is that the point?

Fletcher: That's the point. Take *acanthus*. The word's Greek, meaning almost any prickly plant, usually thorn or thistle. The "thorns and thistles" which, in the Greek Bible, the earth will produce for fallen Man, and which, in sign of Christ's sacrifice, reappear as the crown of thorns in the Crucifixion: "And when they had platted a crown of thorns [*akanthon*], they put it upon his head" (Matthew 27:29). That's why Milton places acanthus proleptically in the Garden of Eden:

> Laurel and Mirtle, and what higher grew
> Of firm and fragrant leaf; on either side
> Acanthus . . .

For St. Thomas the acanthus is symbolic; thistles stand for the minor sins, thorns for the greater sins. So the acanthus combines ideas of the Fall, the Earthly Paradise, and the Passion. Hence the acanthus columns, which, in the nave of Sant' Apollinare in Classe and in cathedral close and cloister everywhere in Europe, recreate the Garden, whose entrance, according to the principles of sacred architecture, lies only *through* the Church. To enter the Garden, you must first pass symbolically through the Stations of the Cross; by so doing, you participate in the Passion. And in Eliot's poem, there's more than a casual link, I suspect, between the erotic passion of the honeymooners and the Passion itself.

III

Saettaro: There *is* a link, and nobody will be surprised to learn that it happens to be Dante. Eliot's and Ruskin's wind-drifted acanthus both derive from Dante's Earthly Paradise. Here is the passage:

> *Un aura dolce,* sanza mutamento
> avere in sé, mi feria per la fronte
> non di più colpo che *soave vento*;
>
> *per cui le fronde, tremolando,* pronte
> tutte quante piegavano a la parte
> u' la prim' ombra gitta il santo monte;
>
> non però dal loro esser dritto sparte
> tanto, che li augelletti per le cime
> lasciasser d'operare ogne lor arte;
>
> ma con piena letizia *l'ore prime,*
> cantando, ricevieno *intra le foglie,*
> che tenevan bordone a le sue rime,
>
> tal qual di ramo in ramo si raccoglie
> per la pineta *in su 'l lito de Chiassi*
> *quand' Ëolo scilocco fuor discioglie.*
>
> (*Purgatorio 28,* 7-21)

> [*A sweet breeze,* itself invariable, was striking on my brow with no greater force than a *gentle wind, before which the leaves, responsively trembling,* were all bending toward that quarter, where the holy mount casts its first shadow; yet not so far bent aside from their erect state, that the little birds in the tops ceased to practice their every art; but, singing, with full gladness they welcomed *the first breezes within* the leaves, which were murmuring the burden to their songs; even such as from bough to bough is gathered *through the pine wood on Chiassi's shore, when Aeolus lets loose Sirocco.*]

It's this *aura dolce* quivering the leaves of the Garden at dawn that *chapitaux d'acanthe que tournoie le vent* evokes. I've cited the whole passage because the final tercet suggests to me that Eliot hoped to make *us* hear it too. Listen to those insistent sibilants of the last line and a half—*in su 'l lito di Chiassi/quand, Ëolo scilocco fuor discioglie*. What we hear is the

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dawn breeze soughing the great *pineta* of Chiassi (the Classe of our poem, the site of Sant' Apollinare) outside Ravenna. Musically, Eliot's whispering phrase—*d'ici est Saint Apollinaire/En Classe*—echoes Dante's. And the enjambment, by breaking the end-stopped pattern, signals the presence of the allusion.

Butz: Good try, but I'm not convinced. What after all does your evidence for Dante's presence here amount to? A couple of sibilants, the locale, and a run-on line. That just won't do.

Ayres: It *will* do. In 1910 Eliot, like our honeymooners, made a trip across northern Italy. In Verona, in the basilica of San Zeno Maggiore, his entry on the porphyry font reads: "Four fine capitals, Romanesque, of foliage, one leaves [*sic*] blown to the right by the aura."[1] Note that *aura*—Dante's word for the dawn breeze in the Garden. And bear in mind that Eliot's Italian was minimal, restricted almost exclusively to Dante, whom he studied, in his little *tascabile* Temple edition, while traveling. I conclude that Eliot went to Verona and Venice (and possibly to Ravenna, a pilgrimage to Dante's tomb) with a Dantesque ear, but also with an eye, educated by Ruskin, on the lookout for acanthus capitals. And that what he saw in Verona and Venice was combined with what he saw, or read in his Baedeker, of the acanthus columns of Sant' Apollinare. In any case, as that *aura* plainly demonstrates, Eliot had *already,* by 1910, seven years before writing "Lune de Miel," linked Ruskin's wind-drifted acanthus with the *aura dolce* of Dante's *divina foresta.* For Ruskin, the late Romantic, those drifting leaves are "ideas of life," viewed with essentially *aesthetic* relish. Dante's leaves are also those of the natural world, but that world reveals the Maker of it. The viewer's eye is *religious.*

Butz: That's not quite fair to Ruskin, who was no less Dante-saturated than Eliot. Ruskin was also thinking of the Garden, wasn't he?

Fletcher: True. But Eliot's point is an attitude which, in the main, Ruskin represents. The Romantic's cult of nature is one in which formerly religious feeling is deflected toward, or reduced to, aesthetic feeling. And that's what Eliot's after. In the image of the wind-drifted leaves two very different cultural points of view are being focused and *contrasted,* and it's important not to confuse them. Why? Because, if I'm right, Eliot's strategy here is an intricate layering of cultural and historical strata which, in the way they relate to one another, reveal what Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" called "the mind of Europe" and, no less important, how the mind of Europe is "a mind that changes." In short, the poem is like a palimpsest—one of those parchment manuscripts in which a later writing has been written over an earlier one.

Saettaro: Excuse me, Fletcher, but I want to finish with my earlier point. The Dante allusions here are richer than we might suspect.

The *Commedia,* everyone knows, is linked by intricate correspondence. The *selva oscura* of the *Inferno,* for instance, corresponds to the *divina foresta* of the *Purgatorio.* This, in turn, corresponds to still another Garden, in a passage pertinent to our poem. The apostle John asks Dante in how many ways, and also in what ways, he is bound to God:

> Ma dì ancor, se tu senti altre corde
> tirarti verso lui, sì che tu suone
> *con quanti denti questo amor ti morde.*
>
> [But tell me if you feel other cords draw you toward Him, so that you speak forth *with how many teeth this love bites you.*]

To which Dante replies:

1 Entry on "Verona" in Eliot's Italian notebook of 1910. San Zeno left a permanent impression on Eliot's memory. "The English Church," he wrote in 1926, "has . . . no building so beautiful as the Cathedral of Modena or the basilica of St. Zeno in Verona." In Eliot's office at Faber & Faber hung reproductions of San Zeno Maggiore, of Theodora's tomb at Ravenna, and of the Madonna of the Byzantine mosaic at Murano.

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> . . . *Tutti quei morsi*
> che posson far lo cor volger a Dio
> alla mia caritate son concorsi;
>
> chè l'essere del mondo, e l'esser mio,
> la morte ch'ei sostenne perch' io viva,
> e quel che spera ogni fedel, com' io,
>
> con la predetta conoscenza viva,
> tratto m'hanno del mar dell' amor torto,
> e del diritto m'han posto all riva.
>
> *le fronde, onde s'infronda tutto l'orto*
> *del ortolano etterno, am' io cotanto*
> *quanto da lui a lor di bene è porto.*
>
> (*Paradiso 26,* 49-60)

[*All those bites* which have power to make the heart turn to God have collaborated in my love; for the being of the world and my own being, the death that He sustained that I might live, and that which every believer hopes for, as do I, have drawn me from the sea of misdirected love and set me on the shore of right love. *The leaves wherewith all the garden of the eternal Gardener is leaved, I love in measure of the good that has been proffered to them from Him.*]

Dante's thought here is extremely compressed, saturated in texts of Biblical and neo-Platonic origin. But that final tercet contains Dante's personal avowal of love (*am' io*) for the leaved Garden, that is, for Christ the Vine ("I am the true vine"). Once we hear it, the effect on the poem is as unmistakable as it is startling. Behind Ruskin, the Romantic *amateur de chapitaux d'acanthe,* looms the figure of Dante, the medieval God-intoxicated lover of the leaves with which God's Garden is leaved. Here, in short, vividly present in the image of the wind-trembled stone leaves, are the diverse layers, Romantic and medieval, of this laminated poetry. Here, to use Fletcher's metaphor, is our poem-as-palimpsest.

But there's more. In the crown of thorn Christ assumes fallen Man's portion of thorn and thistle; fallen Man, for his part, craves re-union with God. That craving can't be sated by other objects; misdirected toward worldly goals—sexual love, power, wealth—its very insatiability and restlessness reveal its true object: God. Out of the "sea of misdirected love," Man is drawn upwards, bitten by purgatorial pain, toward the Earthly Paradise. Redeemed by love, the fallen soul re-enacts the suffering of its Redeemer. Dante drives his point home with a pun of astonishing boldness: *amor ti morde.* Love *bites,* Love hurts. Desire is an itch, an irritant whose *morsi* sting the soul as the spines of the acanthus pierced the dying Christ. And the *morsures* of Eliot's honeymooners correspond, at a secular level, to Dante's *morsi,* those "bitings of love" that draw the soul upwards toward God.

Ayres: Up from Hell, up from the "Low Countries," toward Terre Haute?

Saettaro: Precisely. The soul is *bitten.* Bitten for biting of the forbidden fruit. Dante's word for this eating isn't the usual *mangiare,* but *mordere, morso:* to gnaw, bite, sting. Toiling upwards in Purgatory, Dante hears of a tree which he will find at the top (*Purg. 24,* 116):

> . . . legno è più su che fu *morso* da Eva.
>
> [A tree is higher up, which was bitten by Eve.]

Beatrice shows Dante the tree, and tells him why Adam fell, and how, by the bite of love, he was redeemed:

> Per *morder* quella, *in pena e desio*
> cinquemila anni e più l'anima prima
> bramò colui che *'l morso in sè punio.*
>
> (*Purg. 33,* 61-3)

[For *biting* that, *in pain and desire* for five thousand years and more the first soul yearned for Him who *punished that biting on Himself.*]

That's the matrix from which Dante will later produce St. John's punning question to Dante (*con quenti denti* . . .) and Dante's remarkably knowing answer.

Anyway, if we look back at our honeymooners in the Ravenna night, their misery has what seems to me a Dantesque resonance.

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The setting's sordid, not because the subject is sex and the poet is squeamish, but because sexuality, as always in Eliot, is presented in terms of the Fall. The *mise en scène* has been made infernally unpleasant. It's a dark, miserably hot Italian summer night. It's sticky, sweaty. There's a pervasive stench of animal heat and summer oestrus. Dante's Inferno, someone remarked, seems to have been modelled on a hellish kennel, whose demons have currish names like Graffiacane, Cagnazzo, Malacoda. These demons *bite*. That *forte odeur de chienne,* I think, isn't simple misogyny, but the doggy reek of Death. Or perhaps both. Love and death in Dante, you recall, are fatally related by Francesca's tersely pointed pun: *Amor condusse noi ad una morte.* But the essential thing is those *morsi* by which the fallen soul is punished. Desire *is* the *morso*; desire (*amor torto*) *is* the punishment. In Canto 17 Dante describes how the sinners defend themselves from the flakes of falling fire:

> Non altrimenti fan *di state i cani,*
> or col ceffo, or coi pie, quando son *morsi*
> *o da pulci o da mosche o da tafani.*
>
> [Not otherwise do *the dogs in summer,* now with snout, now with paw, when they are *bitten by flies, or fleas, or gadflies.*]

A vivid simile designed to fix itself in the reader's memory so that the poet can ring his thematic changes: *amor, morte, morsi.* Those Dantesque *morsi,* I'm convinced, are the source, or rather the medieval antecedent, of Eliot's *morsures,* by virtue of which the honeymooners claim affinity, not with the Limbo company of Ruskinian aesthetes, but with those who've dared "the awful daring of a moment's surrender." Hell for them is here and now.

Butz: They're married, you mean.

Ayres: That's not quite the point. Not here. Not yet. They've "fallen in love." They're *fallen. Ils restent sur le dos.* Supine, not prone. A crucial distinction in Eliot. I think of the "fallen woman" in "The Waste Land"—"By Richmond I raised my knees/ Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe"—or the epileptic Ariadne in "Sweeney Erect," also supine. They're flat on their backs, but their eyes look upward, toward the light.

Guillaume: Toward the world they've lost. Toward Terre Haute. Fallen, they want to rise. Hot and sweaty, they want refreshment—that *soave vento,* quickening, unfelt, in the stone leaves of Saint Apollinaire a league away. Their misery craves relief from Hell, from the *morsi* of sexual love, restlessness, repetition. Their darkness wants a light—something like that welcome light that greets Dante and Vergil when they emerge from Hell.

Saettaro: Which is surely why the second stanza begins with the lovers' plans for the next morning. The break indicates the movement from Hell to Purgatory, from dark to light. The groom's projecting his itinerary. It's a long haul from the Low Countries to Terre Haute. There are places to "do," pilgrimages to make to the "shrines" of Western culture. The caricature of the mid-American tourist is subtly qualified by the Dantesque pilgrimage. I don't suppose Terre Haute means Paradise, but it must at least be the *santo monte.* Whatever they *think* they're looking for, their unconscious purpose is to recover the Eden from which they've been expelled. It's home—Terre Haute in the higher sense—they're really seeking. *Amor ti morde.*

Ayres: In worldly terms, their journey is horizontal, through physical space and time. But there's also a vertical or spiritual passion at work. They have the potentiality, if not the conscious desire, for moving upward, in the long spiraling movement of Dante's Purgatory. Or, to put it in Bradleyan language, there's both extension and intension here. In extension, they move through physical space (*Ravenne, Suisse, France*) and ordinary time (that *train de huit heures*). In intension, the movement's vertical and spiritual, an anagogical ascent from the Low Countries to Terre Haute. A long haul, true. But for all its apparently groping aimlessness, it's the right path. The path which, in Eliot's dynamics of the spirit, leads through action, suffering, depri-

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vation, death. Those who refuse to act are doomed to Limbo; they remain incompletely human, innocent of both good and evil. Action may lead nowhere, but by daring good or evil the human soul enters time and history. It falls, but its fall is the condition of its redemption. So spiritually as well as physically, the lovers will have "crossed the frontier." *Ils auront vu la Suisse, et traversé la France.* They've *acted.* Action may not lead to salvation, but it's the crucial first step. Hopeful because necessary; nothing more. I mean, the poem shies away from any outright religious affirmation, doesn't it? The upward movement is tenuous, perhaps abortive. The Spirit makes its epiphany, but the lovers veer away.

Fletcher: Let me return to my earlier point, that "Lune de Miel" is a deliberately constructed palimpsest. I'm convinced that Eliot's poetry in this period, roughly 1916 through 1922, is not, as critics have thought, based on unrelated allusions and fragments. They're not simply, *pace* Kenner, "echo chambers." Rather, they're intricately *ordered.* Typically, there's a single complex metaphor or event, like the shaving ape in "Sweeney Erect" or in this poem the bug-bitten honeymooners and the lovers of leaves. This image or event is historically layered, each layer of diverse cultural provenance, each one linked to its predecessor as the Ruskinian *amateur* is linked to his Dantesque forerunner. The different layers may not be immediately identifiable. Just as in archaeology you can't be sure how many strata a given site contains, so you can't be sure just how many laminae there are in a given poem. Things have to sort themselves out. You mull the poem, you read and re-read. You meditate on the music and the meaning. Then, perhaps, you feel a peripheral disturbance, something your interpretation doesn't account for. An allusion may be signaling its presence. You have to revise your reading, *refine* it.

The poet counts, perhaps unreasonably, on a reader sufficiently at home in the tradition (or Eliot's version of that tradition) to track down the source of the disturbance. At first sight our poem looks deceptively simple: the confrontation of a sordid present and a glorious past. This, in fact, is how the poem has usually been read.[2] But then details begin to disturb. As the strata are uncovered, as the different texts of the palimpsest begin to "converse," the poem begins to acquire depths—depths which are intimately linked with the surface. Reading it, we come to consciousness of ourselves. We recognize the ghosts or avatars which, unrecognized, might otherwise master us, just as the ghosts of the European past possess these American tourists, dimly pursuing some fatal X that lingers on in the deconsecrated religious monuments of Europe. These honeymooners are literally haunted by something they remember—but *what,* they don't know. What counts is *coming* to consciousness of it. "The difference between the present and the past," Eliot observed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," "is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show."

Butz: That quotation sounds very reassuring, Fletcher, but I want to protest your tendency to overwhelm the surface with traditional meanings and swamp the individual talent with the past. The result is that Eliot's wit and alertness to modern life vanish, and that's a great pity. You're over-reading.

Ayres: I'm inclined to agree. Fletcher's account of Eliot's laminated poetry is one that I find tempting since it accords with the theory advanced in Eliot's essay. But we're in danger of losing touch with the human situation of the poem, the plight of these poor honeymooners. Either that, or their misery is simply too banal to bear all this Dantesque

2 Edmund Wilson, for instance, wrote in *Axel's Castle*: "In 'Lune de Miel,' the Middle American travellers, stifled with the summer heat and devoured by the bedbugs of Ravenna, are contrasted with the noble crumbling beauty of the old Byzantine church less than a league away, of which they are totally unaware and to which they have apparently no relation." Similarly dismissive are the accounts of Grover Smith, Jr., Bernard Bergonzi, and A.D. Moody. Hugh Kenner's interpretation, while somewhat more charitable, is magisterially evasive.

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burden. The immediate occasion—two unhappy American honeymooners "doing Europe"—is too much a commonplace to justify all this erudition, no matter how apt the parallels may be.

Butz: And what exactly do you mean, Fletcher, by these honeymooners' "erotic passion," a phrase you've used repeatedly? Now Dante's passion-bitten or God-bitten sinners—*that's* a passion I can grasp. It's *there,* in the poetry. But where is it in Eliot's poem? All we get is two bug-bitten honeymooners. In fact, it's not even clear that this marriage has ever been consummated, except vicariously perhaps, as with the lovers in Donne's "The Flea":

> This flea is you and I, and this
> Our marriage-bed, and marriage temple is . . .

Where's the *passion* in Eliot's grubby little scene? Where's the "objective correlative"? Or is it all just symbolic and metaphorical?

Fletcher: One objection at a time. I'll try to deal with your last point, Butz, in due course. So far as the structural argument is concerned, I may have overstated my case, but I'm sticking to my guns. I see a discernible pattern in these poems. If there *is* such a pattern, it ought to be explored. *Then* we can decide whether the erudition's excessive or not. I have no wish whatever to diminish the wit here, or demote the surface sense, or undercut Eliot's alertness to modern life. But very little else has been reported of these poems. What interests me is the wit that's *not* been reported—the way in which the poems outwit their own surface—but also the reader who *stays* with the surface, who assumes that Terre Haute means nothing but an Indiana city, and that Eliot's point is a nasty little satire on two Midwestern "culture-vultures."

It's important, I agree, to insist on the present, as Eliot did; what's wrong is staying with it, denying the past in the teeth of the allusions and their patterning. If I'm right, the poem's wit lies in the tension between past and present, in the way in which the commonplace of "doing Europe" is revalued and the surface caricatures are queried and found wanting. As for the "human situation," I think there's pathos in the honeymooners' plight, but that depends on our ability to see them in a larger perspective, in terms of a past which *survives* into the present. "The poet," Eliot said, "is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past; unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living." That "already" is the heart of the matter; it applies to our honeymooners as it *should* apply to the readers. But where do we go from here?

Saettaro: I'm afraid I have no urgent destination in mind. Ayres? Butz? Anyone?

IV

Fletcher: Then let me suggest the next move. My point about the peripheral disturbance caused by an unrecognized allusion was based on my own experience. I was disturbed at first by what seemed Eliot's exaggerated emphasis on those *morsures*—all that swelling, itching, scratching, biting, and sweating. True, nobody likes spending a *nuit blanche* being bitten by bedbugs or mosquitoes. But why should a poet like Eliot, notorious for ellipsis and understatement, harp at such length on the symptoms? Then I recalled that in "Dans le Restaurant" there's the same stress on precisely the same symptoms—itching, scratching, etc. That seemed odd. So I asked myself whether there wasn't another allusion concealed here.

And of course there is, and in just the texts where, given Eliot, you'd expect to find it—St. Augustine and Plato. The Augustinian allusion comes from the same paragraph of the *Confessions* echoed in "The Waste Land" ("To Carthage then I came . . ."). But here's the passage:

> I went to Carthage, where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust. I had not yet fallen in love, but was in love with the idea of it. . . . I began to look around for some object for my love, since I badly wanted to love something. . . . Although my real need was for you,

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> my God . . . I was not aware of this hunger. . . . Because of this my soul fell sick. It broke out in ulcers and looked about desperately for some material, worldly means of relieving the itch [*scalpi*: to scratch, tickle, itch] which they caused. But material things, which have no soul, could not be true objects for my love.

The relevance of this passage to Dante's *morsi* and Eliot's *morsures* must be self-evident. And we find the same ambivalent Augustinian dynamic and the same metaphor (once again linked to *chienne*) in the deleted Fresca/Fr(anc)esca section of "The Waste Land":

> (The same eternal and consuming itch
> Can make a martyr, or plain simple bitch).

Behind Augustine, by whatever intermediaries, one always finds Plato. And it's Plato, I think, who is the ultimate source of Dante's *morsi* and Eliot's *morsures*. No matter that (apart from the Latin *Timaeus*), Dante never read Plato. It's enough that Eliot did.

In a famous passage of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes the human soul in the throes of passion. Eros is the inward *daimon* or power which causes the lover's soul to sprout the wings with which he will soar from the physical world below to the spiritual world above. From Pays-Bas to Terre Haute. The human soul is in exile, Socrates explains, a tourist of sorts in the material world, where it lives with transience, plurality, and death, with "reflections and shadows" of the divine world above. Once the soul was a winged creature; it lived in joy, among the gods, seeing with open eyes "the things that really are." Then, somehow deflected, it lost its wings, it "fell." Now it lives a submarine life, imprisoned in materiality like an oyster in its shell. But even in its exiled state, it retains a dim memory (*mnēmē*; *anamnēsis*) of its former life and its old home among the gods. It's because it "remembers" that the soul is so divinely discontented, so restless to recover what it has lost. In the face and body of its beloved, it detects a vestige of the lost radiance and seeks sexual union.

But sexual pleasure can't satisfy its craving. It seeks something beyond pleasure, "something else" (*ti allo*), which can only be obtained by growing wings, by transcending itself. But the growth of spiritual wings is painful. For Plato, too, love *hurts*. Eros *bites*:

> When the lover who . . . retains an intense vision of his former divine existence, sees a godlike face or bodily form which truly resembles Beauty, he immediately shivers, and something of the old awe overwhelms him. He feels the reverence he might feel on seeing a god. . . . Then he is suddenly drenched with *sweat*, he feels strangely *warm*. As the warmth increases, those parts of the soul from which the feathers sprout . . . begin to soften. As the nourishment streams in, the quills of the feathers . . . *swell and sprout* over the whole surface of the soul. . . . Now, at every point, the soul is *throbbing wildly*. And just as children who are teething feel an *itching and painful irritation* where the growing teeth cut into the gums, so the soul, in the process of growing feathers, *aches and tickles and itches*. . . . Then each quill, blocked up with the soul's craving, *throbs like a pulsing artery, pricking at* each pore—until the whole soul, *gadfly-bitten* and goaded, *rages with pain*. But then, as she remembers the possessor of Beauty, she rejoices. The mingling of these two sensations torments the soul, and *in its madness it cannot sleep at night, it cannot stay in one place by day, but filled with yearning, goes wherever it thinks it might behold the possessor of Beauty.*

Those are the symptoms of Eros everywhere in Plato: sweating, itching, swelling, the maddening bite of the gadfly (*oistros* = English "oestrus"), sleeplessness at night, the soul's frantically restless quest for the ideal Beauty it once glimpsed and still somehow remembers. Agonized by need, it tries to return to its sources, its own divine preexistence. Its goad is pain, the gadfly Eros which stings it.

Ayres: Butz objected earlier that there's no "erotic passion" as such in Eliot. But he's wrong. After all, the same charge could be brought against Plato, whose phenomenology of Eros is metaphorically allusive but

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sexually quite explicit. *Pruritus* pure and simple; the whole cyclical process of sexuality. I mean, *look* at Eliot's lovers. They spread their legs, the flesh rises and falls, the recurrent tumescence only partly relieved by the counter-friction of scratching. Eliot's emphasis isn't, I agree, on satisfaction, but rather dissatisfaction, on the recurrent failure to achieve the permanent fusion—that "something else" that keeps eluding them. The poet's point is dissatisfied recurrence, the way in which the lovers keep dissolving into their separate identities, fragmenting, not fusing. The unity that might relieve their "itch" is what *we* glimpse a league away—that *soave vento* riffling the leaves of the Garden.

Fletcher: Thanks, Ayres. I've been itching myself to get back to that Garden. I'm fascinated, I confess, by the image of those wind-drifted leaves. And while you were speaking the thought kept tugging at me that, behind the Ruskin and Dante passages, other texts—for example, Vergil's passage on the golden bough—were latently working. But the ancient text I feel most strongly looming up under the others is, once again, the *Phaedrus*. You all recall, I think, the clearly paradisal setting. Phaedrus has led Socrates out into the countryside, along the Ilissos. A hot summer day, high noon, a grove of trees, cicadas shrilling in the leaves, a grassy bank beside the cool stream. All the standard details of the classical paradise.

"You see that towering plane-tree?" Phaedrus asks Socrates. "There's shade there, and a gentle breeze [*pneuma metrion*]." "By Hera," Socrates exclaims, "it's a beautiful pace to rest in. The plane-tree, with its high, spreading branches, and the agnus castus so tall and shady . . . fill the place with fragrance. . . . And the spot seems sacred, sacred to the nymphs and Achelous. . . . I repeat, how *lovely* [*agapeton,* i.e., "lovable"] and sweet it is, the breeziness of the place!" Ostensibly, Socrates is the quintessential city-man. His unfamiliarity with the locale is strongly stressed. "You're astonishing, Socrates," says Phaedrus, "you're really completely out-of-place here [*atopotatos,* i.e., "placeless," but metaphorically, "extraordinary" or even "absurd," incapable of being "placed" or "categorized"]." But then Phaedrus reveals that *he* is even less familiar with the locale than Socrates: "Isn't it somewhere hereabouts that Boreas carried off the nymph Oreithyia?" "No," says Socrates, "the site of that legend is two stades downstream, near the shrine of Agra." "I didn't notice," says Phaedrus. We see that Socrates is not only more perceptive but also less "out of place" than he seems. In some sense of "know," he knows this countryside like the back of his hand. Socrates, I mean, *remembers.* We watch him, ecstatic with the beauty of the spot, apparently novel in its freshness, rediscovering a divine landscape he'd "forgotten." Socrates is in fact shown experiencing the very *anamnēsis,* the theory of memory, which he will teach Phaedrus in the course of the dialogue—that even though a homeless exile in the world, the soul still remembers its lost home among the gods and its sacred places. It remembers a garden (*paradeisos*), a gentle breeze stirring the leaves of the highest tree. And it *loves* what it remembers. Socrates too, I mean, suddenly stands revealed, alongside Dante and Ruskin, as the third lover of the wind-drifted leaves of the lost garden. The palimpsest is complete.

Two more points. First, Eros. Socrates remarks, "There seems to be a divine presence in this place, so you mustn't be surprised if I become like one possessed." The power possessing him is Eros (and also Pan), whose dynamic Socrates comes to *incarnate* in the course of the dialogue. He is the spiritual *erastés,* the lover-teacher who, shuddering in the presence of the god in those he loves, can incite his students to realize the divinity that is their birthright. As erotic irritant, he is metaphorically compared to the Great Gadfly (or, in a parallel image, the sting-ray) who inflicts on his students, like Phaedrus, the bite of becoming, the pain of self-realization. For Plato too, as I said, love *hurts.*

Second, Socrates's speech is *ensouled.* He teaches Phaedrus "the language [*logos*] which is written with knowledge in the soul of the learners." Phaedrus shows that he has mastered his teacher's lesson by correctly defin-

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ing that *logos*: "You mean the living and breathing word [*logos empsychos,* i.e., "ensouled speech"] of which the written word may be called the image." Philosophically, that is, Socrates's speech fuses universal and particular, form and matter. The Idea participates in its particulars just as the *forme précise de Byzance* inheres in the *pierres écroulantes* and the stone columns of the material world are informed by the wind blowing from another world. I have no wish as a classicist to Platonize Eliot. But his poetics are those of a poet saturated in the Idealist point of view that links, beneath all differences, Plato and Aristotle, the neo-Platonists and Christian mystics, Dante, Spinoza, Hegel, and, most important for Eliot, F.H. Bradley.

This particular poem operates, I'm convinced, according to what I'd call the Idealist and Symbolist poetics of Plato's Divided Line. A great liminal line—a cosmic scrim or penetrable veil—divides two apparently sundered worlds. The wind stirring the stone leaves stands for the invisible or spiritual (*pneumatikos*) world on the upper side of the line. Call this upper side Form, or Universal, or Being, or the One. On the lower side is a replica world of diminished reality—of particulars, matter, becoming, plurality. Somehow, these worlds intersect and interact. There's ideality in all ordinary reality; ordinary reality aspires to ideality. Thus, in Eliot a *restaurant pas cher* is the worldly counterpart of the Last Supper; an ordinary cocktail party becomes a shadow play of the Communion. The bridegroom's petty reckonings are a glance at Eliot's own habit of meticulously jotting down each day's expenses while traveling; but they're also perhaps a hint of Platonic progress, of movement from the sensual world to numerical abstractions that leads toward the Ideas. But the scrim is, to my mind, relentlessly Platonic. The honeymooners' world is a world of the Many—of crumbling stones and restless, mutable, perishing particulars. Hence the calculus of constantly multiplying numbers: two sheets, two hundred bedbugs, two knees fragmenting into four soft limbs, the eight o'clock train, the groom's calculations. Eros, Plato said, aims at "making one out of two"; but here Eros dissolves into multiplying plurality. "Numbers," observed Plotinus, glossing Plato, "are fallen unity." For Baudelaire original sin was unity become duality.

Ayres: Things "add up" but nothing coheres. Even sexual pleasure vanishes in a dulling tedium of repetition, the torpor of mere numbers. There's no satisfaction in it. Why? Because it's an instance of what Hegel and Bradley termed the "spurious infinite"[3]—unending repetition of the finite which, precisely because its *end* is finite, can never escape finitude, even though the intensity with which that end is pursued shows that its true aim is infinity and unity. It wants, but doesn't know it wants, Plato's "something else," something beyond sex, so it's doomed to perpetual disappointment. Physically the lovers fragment into a repeatedly copulating composite of discrete parts. And instead of becoming truly "one," they dissolve into the impersonality of the social "One"; at least I suppose that's the point of *"On relève"* at line seven. Reality for them is just this misery of sensual repetition; the ideality to which it unknowingly aspires is represented by the saint's hard, conceptual rigor. But, however diminished, that ideality—that unsatisfied craving for a completeness beyond themselves—*inheres* in them just as the form of the basilica still *holds (tient)* in the crumbling stones.

Guillaume: I'm reminded of the similarly emphatic *hold* in the more genial juxtaposition of real and ideal, present and past, in

3 Bradley applies Hegel's concept as a means of refuting the calculation according to which the chief aim of human life is "pleasure for pleasure's sake." See his *Ethical Studies,* page 95: "The practical end of ethical behaviour . . . must present itself to us as some definite unity, some concrete whole that we can realize in our acts, and carry out in our life. And pleasure (as pain) we find to be nothing but a name which stands for a series of this, that, and the other feelings. . . . How, then, if pleasures make no system, if they are a number of perishing particulars, can the whole that is sought be found in them? It is the old question, how find the universal in mere particulars?"

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"The Waste Land," in Lower Thames Street:

> The pleasant whining of a mandoline
> And a clatter and a chatter from within
> Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
> Of Magnus Martyr *hold*
> Inexplicable splendor of white and gold.

Saettaro: Which brings us back to Dante, for whom the Church represented the perfect incarnation (or Aristotelian immanence) of the One in the Many, the universal in the particular, and form in matter. At least in theory the medieval Church is a collective ecumenical One, the communion of believers, of those who share, and therefore *are,* Christ's body.

V

Ayres: Yes, but there's a crucial and revealing difference, isn't there, between Dante's ecclesiastical Garden and the abandoned basilica of Eliot's poem? In the poem, real and ideal, matter and form, are shown, not as coherent but rather as sundered. In Hegel's language, they're "dirempted opposites"; they couldn't in fact be farther apart. That's why the church is abandoned. But because they're *paired* opposites, reciprocally defined, their separation points to a past or future fusion at a higher level, to what Hegel called an *Aufhebung.* That implied fusion is the *living* church—a fusion glimpsed peripherally in the wind-drifted columns in the first stanza and the persisting immanence of the *forme précise* in the second. It's important, by the way, not to confuse the saint with the church which bears his name. They're related, but they're not the same. That's why the sixteenth line begins with the saint in person, *Et Saint Apollinaire, raide et ascétique,* but in the next line the saint modulates into the basilica named for him: *Vieille usine, désaffectée de Dieu.*

The phrasing here is intensely evocative, surely the most telling musical phrase of the entire poem. Everything converges. The subtle modulation of saint into church, the sonority of the phrasing, the brocading of the vowels, the mournfully delaying caesura—everything combines to suggest the momentous absence and perversion it describes. The church is a resonant emptiness, but an emptiness that breathes, waiting, the expectant emptiness of a time and place waiting to be filled and redeemed. In its very desecration—the church as abandoned factory or warehouse—it implicitly contains, according to Eliot's dynamic, the essential condition of rebirth and renewal. For men or for churches, the dynamic's the same: In my end is my beginning.

I repeat: the point here isn't merely the desperate opposition of lovers and saint, but the fusion implied by their opposition. At least in Bradley's Hegelian dialectic, the more extreme the opposition, the greater the necessity for reconciliation at a higher level. The higher reconciliation corresponds, I think, to Dante's Church. For Bradley, as for Hegel, a *genuine* institution—nation, church, or society—is a true "concrete universal," an organic collective in which the private self "bursts its limits" and combines with other private selves into a higher self and a new unity. But let Bradley speak for himself:

> Where a whole is complete in finite beings, which know themselves to be 'elements' and members of its system, this *is* the consciousness in such individuals of their own completeness. . . . It is the self-realization of each member . . . to be himself, he must go beyond himself, to live his own life he must live a life which is not *merely* his own, but which, none the less, on the contrary all the more, is intensely and emphatically his own individuality.

In the church as "concrete universal," the unhappy finitude and isolation of the individual is transcended in a new organic unity at a higher level—a level which would also correspond, I suppose, to Plato's Republic. And here too the individual's homing course lies, if only ideally, in leaving the Pays-Bas for Terre Haute.

Fletcher: Poetically too, I think, you get the same strategy, the same effort to *suggest* a fusion at a higher level of what at first or even

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second sight seem irreconcilable or antithetical terms: past versus present, sense versus thought, real versus ideal. A poetics, if you like, of the "concrete universal." Eliot was, in his own words, "one of the great experimenters," but, unlike most merely fashionable experimenters, he held fast to "whatever was permanent in the varied phenomena of experience." The dead voices of the past are renewed, not merely resumed, in the living voice. Eliot charts the mind of Europe as that mind reveals itself in a recurrent trope or idea: ensouled speech, trans-humanizing Eros, original sin, the eternal Garden. Theme for theme, point for point, the ideas rhyme and the tropes correspond. The convergences, the unity and continuity, are astonishing. But, just as important, there's diversity in that continuity. "The mind of Europe . . . is a mind which changes, and . . . this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route,* which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen." We'll badly diminish these palimpsest-poems if we exaggerate the unity at the expense of the diversity, the past at the expense of the present, or vice versa. There's a persistent, purposive tension between traditional and contemporary. That's where the wit, but also the seriousness, lies.

Examples. The trip from the Pays-Bas to Terre Haute is a literal tourist's itinerary. It's also figurative, a journey from the body's "Low Countries" (good Renaissance English, by the way, for the "crotch" or "groin") to the soul's "highlands." But culturally and historically these terms are very differently inflected. I mean, there's a great cultural difference between Plato's Pay-Bas of "shadows and reflections" and Dante's underworld and Hegel's sundered opposites, just as there's a like difference between Plato's empyrean, Dante's *santo monte,* and Hegel's *Aufhebung.* The continuity is provided by Idealism; but then distinctions begin. We have the same *topos,* but the cultural accent changes. The lover-of-the-leaved-garden is a constant defined by cultural variables. Plato's paradisal plane-tree differs from Dante's Edenic tree, and both differ from Ruskin's aesthetically relished acanthus columns. The Ruskinian *amateurs* are Limbo types, barred even from damnation, whereas Dante's sinners, being damned, are forever fixed in Hell (though Eliot may have purposely blurred the impassable frontier between Hell and Purgatory in Dante). Plato's lovers *can* "cross the frontier" of the Divided Line, and so, I suppose, can Bradley's. As for our honeymooners, their situation is undetermined, moot. Deliberately so.

Their journey home is ironic but real. Boats and trains permitting, they'll make it. That they'll make it "home" in the Platonic sense is quite uncertain. True, they've got the Hegelian dynamic working for them, but their *Aufhebung* may be decades, even centuries away. Maybe they'll make it, maybe not. We don't know. Closure is prevented by the intricate crossing of ironic perspectives. Their honeymoon, for instance, is a hellishly "realistic" (that is, sordid) caricature; but look again and the caricature dissolves into the figurative perspective of neo-Platonic "sublunary" love, with perhaps just a glance at Donne's "Dull sublunary lovers' love/ (Whose soul is sense)." The flickering effect is to give the sensual soul a hint of redemptive potential, even a slight hitch up the Platonic ladder. And the caricature tourist conceals, as we've seen, "the spirit unappeased and peregrine," whose presence points ironically back to the ordinary tourist. But in the process the caricature has been, to some meaningful degree, qualified. It has another dimension, a serious aspect. The caricature has been troubled into something like real life. By *virtue* of "falling," they're "on their way," and therefore, in some sense, subtly, almost imperceptibly, *changing.* Or so it seems to me. But even if they aren't changing, their situation is addressed to a reader whose *point of view,* being larger than theirs, *should* have grown and changed in the *act* of reading, passing from the surface caricature to its qualifications and enrichment by the poem and its allusions. Whatever the lovers may or may not know, the reader should have seen that lovers and saint, body and soul, real and

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ideal, are a *dédoublement* which contains the possibility of integration at a higher level. "We vary," wrote Eliot in his (1916) doctoral dissertation on Bradley,

> by passing from one point of view to another . . . or by occupying more than one point of view at the same time; . . . we vary by self-transcendence. . . . For the life of a soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of unifying (to a greater or lesser extent) jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them.

That, it seems to me, is the task imposed upon the honeymooners, but even more clearly upon the reader.

Let me summarize. The poem presents us with an obvious distortion—a caricature. The distortion is designed initially to amuse, but then, I think, to disturb. "To disturb externals"—that's how Eliot explained his poetic purpose in these poems. Properly disturbed, the caricature is qualified by the allusions we've explored. The effect is to deepen the caricature by placing it in the pattern of past experiences which it unknowingly revives. But that resumption is tentative. There's no firm affirmation, merely the latent presence of a pattern awaiting recognition and renewal. The meaning's *there* already, implicit in the experience. We have Eliot's later word for it in *Four Quartets*: "We had the experience, but missed the meaning." The meaning may be missed. Not only by the honeymooners, but by their *semblables,* those readers who stick with the surface grotesques and whose amused superiority the poem collusively solicits only to mock in return.

Everything hangs on catching the *tone.* A tricky task with a poem carefully set in those grey areas that Eliot took such poetic efforts to chart. The overall effect is accordingly complex. There's marked detachment, ironic but not quite satirical, an austerely distanced understanding. Not compassionate, even cold. Uninvolved with the particular case because more deeply involved elsewhere. The effort is to see, seize, penetrate—to get *past* externals. The purpose is to locate the generic, and this would be impeded by the warmly human note. So we have caricature, which requires reduction of detail, the ability to seize upon just the relevant aspects. As Eliot observed of Ben Jonson's functional reduction of detail:

> This stripping is essential to the art, to which is also a flat distortion in the drawing; it is an art of caricature. . . . The "world" of Jonson is sufficiently large; it is a world of poetic imagination; it is sombre. He did not get the third dimension, but he was trying to get it.

By "third dimension" Eliot means not stereoscopic realism but the generic. Anyway, that's why I'm not disturbed by Ayres's complaint that Eliot has scanted the honeymooner's human plight. He *meant* to scant it, distort it even; his aim is a different point of view. The result is a poem of calculated austerity, those bare-bones poetics which Eliot praised in a 1917 review of the poetry of Jean de Bosschère, especially his

> . . . obstinate refusal to adulterate his poetic emotions with ordinary human emotions. Instead of refining ordinary human emotions (and I do not mean tepid human emotions, but human however intense—in the crude living state) he aims direct at emotions of art. He thereby limits the number of his readers, and leaves the majority groping for a clue which does not exist. The effect is sometimes an intense frigidity which I find altogether admirable.

Which doesn't mean that de Bosschère and Eliot give their readers no clue at all, merely that they stubbornly refuse to satisfy the demand for "ordinary human emotions."

Well, that's the austerity, principled and purposive, I detect in "Lune de Miel" and the quatrain poems. They're generic cartoons: witty, stark, detached, cooly analytical. They work through conceits, but of an oddly original sort. The traditional conceit involves the

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witty elaboration of a figure expanded to the breaking point; Eliot's conceits depend upon the complex intrication of culturally layered tropes and *topoi.* Joyce's *Ulysses* strikes me as remarkably similar in method and wit, and it's not surprising that Eliot hailed the first chapters with such enthusiasm. Both writers share an intense concern for the contemporary as a patterned renewal of the universal element in the past, but also an impressive erudition—sufficient to the purpose, I would say. An erudition, by the way, to which nobody seems to object in Joyce.

Guillaume: Notice too how acutely Eliot's eye seizes on the precise particular, the detail of a text that expresses and reveals the point of view of an entire culture. The eye is selective, focused on the essential thing. Thus, of Horace's famous lines beginning *Pallida mors aequo pulsat pede,* Eliot was quick to observe that "A whole civilization resides in these lines." And the same might be said of the texts echoed in our poem, none of which requires greater erudition than the "educated reader" was once assumed to possess. If you had to pick one Platonic dialogue in which classical culture was essentially embodied, you couldn't do better than the *Phaedrus* and Plato's account of Eros. You get a similar distillation of medieval aspiration in Dante's Earthly Paradise, and of the Romantic's cult of nature and art in Ruskin's St. Mark's. Each is culturally distinct, but they're all linked by paradisal feeling, that is, by a common religious, or religiously deflected, passion.

VI

Fletcher: If we ask by what criterion Eliot's eye selects its texts and details, the answer is, I'm convinced, his own (very Bradleyan, no doubt) doctrine of "dissociation of sensibility"—that separation of feeling from thought which he believed began in English poetry in the late seventeenth century. There *were* periods, Eliot held, when "the intellect was immediately at the tips of the senses," when "sensation became word, and word was sensation." Marlowe, Shakespeare, Webster, Tourneur all shared "a quality of sensuous thought, or of thinking through the senses, or of the senses thinking." Whether we agree or disagree, "Lune de Miel" suggests an historical perspective in which periods of "integrated sensibility" are contrasted with periods of more or less "dissociated sensibility." In Eliot's modern world thought and feeling are almost wholly sundered—honeymooners and saint never meet. Ruskin's age is one of imbalance, tilting toward the modern disjunction, denying thought and turning toward sense and sentimentality in the cult of "religious art." With Plato and Dante, we encounter cultures of fully integrated sensibility, exemplified by Socrates's "ensouled speech" and Dante's uncanny fusion of claw-like particularity with transcendental meaning, and also by those anonymous Byzantine sculptors who wedded form to matter, incarnating the invisible in solid stone. These are Eliot's peak periods of sensibility; other ages represent a falling off from this fusion, tilting toward thought, as in the Enlightenment, or toward sensation and sentiment, as in the Romantics.

Butz: In short, what we used to call the Great Western Butterslide. Ever since Dante, the world's been going steadily downhill. Is that it?

Ayres: No, you've missed the point. Eliot's no ordinary *laudator temporis acti,* and this poem isn't just some easy invidious contrast of modern degeneracy with a glorious past. Each of those periods of sensibility that Fletcher described represents what Hegel called a Moment of the Notion, in different degrees or relations of reciprocity. I regret introducing this technical jargon, but you simply can't separate the poet Eliot of this period from the Eliot of the doctoral dissertation on Bradley. Both the poetry and the prose, as he later admitted, are obviously saturated in Bradley's (unmistakably Hegelian) point of *view.* The poet literally thinks and sees in Bradley's terms. The doctrine of dissociated sensibility, for instance, is simply a critical adaptation of Bradley's way of thinking. If you believe that there's such a thing as a "concrete universal," and that that universal is exemplified historically in different ages,

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then there must also be other ages in which there is dissociation, when thought and sense, universal and particular, part company. We've got to think dialectically when reading a poem like this. The layerings of the palimpsest are in fact a record of historical *process*—the successive cultural stages of the changing "mind of Europe." If we lose the sense of dialectical process—of a present moving toward a future, of a past reassumed by the present—we'll lose the governing perspective of the poem.

Eliot's view of the present isn't in doubt. Unless *informed* by the past, it's parochial, impoverished. The separation of modern thought and feeling couldn't be more total. But that's precisely where positive hope begins, when the pendulum begins to swing back—*there,* in the apparent hopelessness of things. The tension between feeling and thought has become so acute that it's humanly intolerable, which means, as we've seen, *hellishly* painful. So it *has* to change; the divided opposites *must,* sooner or later, probably later, move toward each other toward a new fusion at a higher level. But here's the relevant Bradleyan text:

> Feeling, thought, and volition have all defects which suggest something higher. But in that higher unity no fraction of anything is lost. For each one-sided aspect, to gain itself, blends with that which seemed opposite, and the product of this fusion keeps the riches of all. The one reality, we may say from our human point of view, was present in each [one-sided] aspect in a form which does not satisfy. To work out its full nature, it has sunk into these differences. But in each [aspect] it longs for that absolute self-fruition which comes only when the self bursts its limits and blends with another finite self. The desire of each element for a perfection which implies fusion with others is not self-contradictory. It is rather an effort to remove a present state of inconsistency, to remain in which would indeed be a fixed self-contradiction.

So the saint and the honeymooners have sunk into their respective differences in order to work out the order implied by the realization of their *full* nature. The real craves the ideal; the ideal is nothing without the real. Sensation, to fulfill itself, requires thought; thought is merely abstraction unless incarnated in the sensuous. Saint and honeymooners, to realize themselves, must recreate the church. Only through Eros, only by "bursting the limits of the self" can solipsism be escaped and fusion achieved. But practically this can never quite be accomplished; such is the nature of finitude. "Finite experience and perfection," Bradley observed, correcting Hegel's Romantic optimism, "are incompatible. . . . The ideal and the real can never be at one. Their disunion is precisely what we mean by imperfection. And this incompleteness, and unrest, and unsatisfied ideality, are the lot of the finite." All one can do is to reconcile, insofar as possible, real and ideal.

Fletcher: In his seminal essay on Baudelaire, Eliot makes precisely that point *à propos* of Romanticism:

> In much Romantic poetry, the sadness is due to the exploitation of the fact that no human relations are adequate to human desires, but also to the belief in any further object for that which, being human, fails to satisfy them.

That "further object" which might satisfy their desire I take to be identical with Plato's "something else"—that transcendent *ti allo* which human lovers repeatedly seek in the sexual act.

Saettaro: As it's also Dante's ultimate Garden, the great Vine into which each isolated human leaf seeks to be gathered:

> Le fronde onde' s'infronda tutto l'orto
> del ortolano etterno . . .

Ayres: Or in Bradleyan terms, the layerings of the palimpsest-poem point, not only toward the past, but toward a new fusion, a future *Aufhebung* which will recuperate all of the past and present without loss. But there's no Hegelian diapason, merely the hinted possibility of a future consonance founded on the fact, almost or perhaps wholly for-

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gotten, of past consonance. That, and the redemptive dynamic which leads from despair to hope, from death to life, from the Pays-Bas to Terre Haute. Well, we seem to have a consensus.

Butz: Leave me out of your consensus, Ayres. I'm rather uncomfortable, I must say, with all this chipper complacency of expert agreement. And I distrust your orchestration of this Platonic dialogue; at least, I am temperamentally averse to playing one of Socrates's students, monosyllabically assenting to Fletcher's flights. The palimpsest principle, I'm prepared to admit, *seems* to operate in "Lune de Miel," but, generally speaking, I'm extremely skeptical. In fact, I challenge you to demonstrate its applicability to a one-dimensional poem like "Le Directeur" or an obvious social satire like "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar." And even supposing you managed it, I'm very doubtful indeed about a compositional mode which more resembles archaeology or embryology than it does poetry. As you know, I dislike layered, "polysemous" poetry. And I'm put off by crossword-puzzles, crypto-Christian ones especially. Too much Cross, too many acrostics. Puzzles without epiphanies, Frank Kermode perceptively labelled these poems. But now they turn out to be puzzles *with* epiphanies—epiphanies which simply don't, in my opinion, justify the ingenious erudition required to decode them.

Fletcher: Well, I'm prepared to make a vigorous defense of the compositional mode of the palimpsest-poem, which I view as fundamentally organic and not in the least mechanical. Incidentally, Butz, I'm grateful to you for your knowledge of Ruskin, which set us off in the right direction. But just why the critic is entitled to an erudition which is denied to the poet, I can't quite grasp. Certainly it's not a principle Eliot himself held. You're welcome of course to question Eliot's dictum that poetic obscurity is a necessary consequence of the complexity of modern life; I rather doubt that particular notion myself. But Eliot was surely right to argue, in the teeth of Georgian slackness of *mind,* that poetry requires as much fundamental brainwork as a barrister's brief on a complicated case. And though for most of us the thread of tradition has frayed or even snapped, Eliot, like most great poets, took the risks of his knowledge and tradition, writing a poetry that requires of its readers—sensuously musical intelligence, an integrated sensibility—what the critic requires of the age. Your criticism, it seems to me, misses the mark, objecting to the erudition by scanting the musical skill by which that erudition is poetically earned and justified. But even if I proved my point on this and other scores, you'd promptly declare that you simply dislike that *sort* of poetry, both what it means and how it says it.

Guillaume: Excuse me, but time is running out. A few summary points before we adjourn. Eliot, I think we're mostly agreed, held that poetry, real poetry, was precisely "ensouled speech," a concrete universal exhibiting no dissociation of sensibility, in which thought and sense, ideal and real, meaning and music, combined to form an incarnate whole. The vice of late Romantic and Georgian poetry was that it refused the discipline of thought, and by letting the feelings run riot it diminished the power and intensity of those feelings. In the French poems and the quatrains—which I take to be French poems in English—Eliot tried to correct the languidly lyrical irony of "Prufrock" and "Portrait of a Lady," founded on Laforgue, and to subject his own latent Romanticism to an austerely classical discipline based on Corbière's harsher irony and Gautier's drily witty musical precision. He may have gone too far in the direction of thought, but the effort was to correct an imbalance, to write poetry in which the intellect was once again visibly active "at the tips of the senses."

Fletcher: A poetry, you mean, corresponding to the wind-drifted leaves of the Byzantine sculptor—which I take to be, by the way, Eliot's typically subversive tribute to the Vorticist movement?

Guillaume: A poetry of the "concrete universal"—that is, a poetry, as we have seen, modelled on *sculpture,* according to Gau-

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tier's poetic precepts in his famous poem "L'Art":

> Sculpte, lime, cisèle,
> Que ton rêve flottant
> Se scelle
> Dans le bloc résistant.
>
> [Sculpt, polish, chisel, let your floating dream fix itself in the resistant block.]

One last point. Later poems like "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land" are clearly a reaction against the cramping confinement of the quatrain poems, where the allusive inflection becomes at times so dense and intense that the poems literally burst their frames—as, indeed, I suspect they were designed to do. But neither "Gerontion" nor "The Waste Land" would have been as successful as they are without the hard-won musical and technical control of the palimpsest-poem as worked out in the French poems, then Englished in the quatrains, and finally critically proclaimed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

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William Cobbett: "an English episode"

by Gertrude Himmelfarb

The English have had a penchant for the most unlikely heros, heros they've honored more—in the classical meaning of that much abused phrase—in the breach than in the observance. Carlyle was one such hero. The names of his admirers are a roll call of the Victorian greats. Yet he was the least representative thinker of his time, the most heretical, the most outrageous and outlandish. Damning all the "mud-gods" of his age—liberalism, rationalism, utilitarianism, materialism, individualism, laissez-fairism—he was read and revered by those who made that age what it was. Emerson said of *Past and Present* that it was "as full of treason as an egg is full of meat." Even its style was treasonable. The era of Macaulay, Hazlitt, Mill, and Dickens, of writers distinguished for their lucidity, urbanity, and wit, lavished praise upon a critic whose prose was tortuous and turgid, full of neologisms and solecisms, expletives and invectives, capitals and italics, labored metaphors and German phrases. It is as if Carlyle appealed to the "underside" of the culture, the self-doubt and self-denial, even self-hate, that lingered just beneath the surface, a rebelliousness that never quite broke out and yet was never quite pacified.

So it was with another hero of the time, the Grand Old Man of English radicalism, William Cobbett (1763-1835). Cobbett was, one might say, the poor man's Carlyle. He was to the working classes what Carlyle was to the intellectuals, a man more often praised than heeded, a maverick without party or organization but with a considerable and devoted following. Even his style was Carlyle's—choleric, eccentric, abusive, self-congratulatory, occasionally sentimental, more often acrimonious, and always to excess. Carlyle, in his book on heroes, perhaps with himself in mind, had described his prophet-as-hero as an "original." Cobbett was such an original. It is a commentary on the age that two of its most influential men should have been so passionate and intractable, so impervious to the enlightened, progressive ideas of their time.

Yet this most untypical Englishman was described by his contemporaries as the typical "John Bull." Carlyle himself saw Cobbett as that—"the pattern John Bull of his century." So too did the novelist and critic Lytton Bulwer (or Bulwer-Lytton, as he was later known), who in 1833, two years before Cobbett's death, penned a devastating sketch of him under the pseudonym of "William Muscle."

> He is thoroughly English; no other land could have produced the bones and gristle of his mind. He writeth a plain, strong style, and uttereth the most monstrous incredibilities, as if they were indisputable. He esteemeth himself before all men. He believes that the ministers have consulted several times on the necessity of poisoning him. He is indignant if others pretend to serve the People; they are his property. He is the Incarnation of popular prejudices and natural sense. He is changeable as a weather-

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> cock, because he is all passion. He is the living representative of the old John Bull: when he dies, he will leave no like: it was the work of centuries to amalgamate so much talent, nonsense, strength, and foibles, into one man of five feet eight: he is the Old Radical. . . .

It is fitting that this Old Radical should have been the hero of biographers as dissimilar as G.D.H. Cole and G.K. Chesterton, eminent representatives of the radical Left and the radical Right. Less fitting, perhaps, is Cobbett's role in the present biography by George Spater.[1] A formidable work of scholarship, enormously detailed, amply researched, documented, and illustrated, it somehow fails to capture the passion of the man, possibly because it is itself so dispassionate. Spater dutifully acknowledges Cobbett's prejudices, peculiarities, and contradictions, but only dutifully, as befits the conscientious historian, with no great conviction, certainly with no sense that they go to the heart of his subject. There are no "monstrous incredibilities" to be found here (and no quotation from Bulwer to suggest them). It is not a portrait without warts, but they are warts limned in lightly so as to humanize the man without disfiguring him.

Toward the end of the second volume we are even presented with a few warts that we may not have suspected. On the basis of new documents, Spater presents us with facts that suggest a quite different family life from that which Cobbett himself had drawn for us in his autobiographical reminiscences. In his *Advice to Young Men* and in his other writings he frequently cited his own behavior as husband and father as a model for his readers, and adduced his own warm, happy, loving family as an inspiration to them if they would only follow his example. In fact, he turns out to have been a domestic tyrant, as irascible and egotistic in his private life as (this we have always known) in his public. The attempted suicide of his wife in 1827, which Spater attributes, on the basis of her age alone, to a possible "menopausal depression," may more plausibly be accounted for by an impossibly difficult husband. Shortly before that episode he had responded to what he took to be her insubordination by shutting himself away from his family (literally locking himself in a different part of the house) for seventy-four days, refusing to communicate with anyone except in writing. Eventually he formalized what had been a de facto separation by leaving his family entirely. This was in 1833, a time which Spater characterizes as the beginning of his mental "breakdown." Spater gives no evidence of such a breakdown, although he does attribute to it some of the more disagreeable traits brought to light by the new manuscripts. In fact, Cobbett's paranoia, hostility, rage, and egotism verging on megalomania had been conspicuous throughout his life, although they may have been exacerbated by old age. It was, after all, well before that "breakdown" that he virtually separated from the family, so that his children must have been drawing upon earlier memories when they later spoke so bitterly of their home life. Five years after their father's death, the youngest son, then twenty-six, wrote to his sister: "People talk of teaching the young how to shoot—I wish they would teach children to shoot their Fathers and Mothers." Spater prefaces this quotation by describing the letter in which it appeared as the "exuberant" expression of "his preference for the company of young people when their fathers and mothers were out of the way." (This was the only one of Cobbett's seven children to marry at a reasonably young age—indeed, the year after he wrote this letter—and to have a child. The three daughters remained unmarried, and the other three sons married late in life and had no children.)

This matter is of more than biographical interest. Confronted with such letters, Spater admits that *Advice to Young Men,* written in 1829-30 when Cobbett's estrangement from his family was nearly complete, was largely mythical, indeed part of a larger myth about the whole of his life starting with his own

1 George Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend.* Cambridge University Press, two volumes, 653 pages, $49.50

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supposedly idyllic childhood on the farm—from which he ran away at the age of eleven. But if these parts of the *Advice* were mythical, so were the many articles in the *Political Register,* the newspaper from which he derived most of his influence, which also drew upon the supposed experiences of his youth. And so too, perhaps, his image of "old England," which he dramatically counterposed to the miseries and iniquities of the present "System." It is an axiom of historical scholarship that a source that is known to be seriously flawed in one respect is "tainted" as a whole, not to be trusted in any other respect without independent confirmation. Yet Spater all too often relies upon these sources, accepting at face value what Cobbett chose to tell his readers.

In his own time Cobbett was repeatedly accused of lying, exaggerating, and contradicting himself. Spater occasionally alludes to these charges but without giving much weight to them. One such charge elicits the observation: "Lies? That there were such occasional lies cannot be doubted. Misstatements of fact are inevitable even in a modern newspaper with its superior information-gathering services. And in Cobbett's case his radical opinions and hyperbole were readily translated into lies by his opponents." In one footnote Spater admits that Cobbett had "no compunction about lying when he thought it appropriate," that when he was on trial he confessed to having lied, but in a worthy cause. Elsewhere Spater explains that Cobbett used facts not literally but impressionistically: "Like most good talkers, Cobbett regarded the exact fact as unimportant; it was the impression that he wished to create." Those "impressions" serve well as indications of Cobbett's ideas, opinions, and attitudes, but not, as they are so often taken, as evidence of the conditions and events of his time.

Fortunately, for much of this work Cobbett is not the exclusive source. In reconstructing some of the more complicated episodes of his life, Spater has drawn upon a wide literature, so that for the first time we have a reasonably complete picture of his tumultuous life: his career in the army from 1784 to 1791, followed by the court martial of three officers he had charged with embezzling funds of the regiment; his flight to France to avoid appearing at the court martial and his subsequent sailing for America when revolutionary France became too dangerous; his eight years in America, where, under the name of "Porcupine," he was a thorn in the side of homegrown and foreign Jacobins and a staunch defender of Tory England; his return to England in 1800 and the founding of the *Political Register* two years later, the weekly paper that was the vehicle of his opinions and one of the main sources of his influence for thirty-three years; his conversion to radicalism in 1806, conviction on the charge of sedition in 1810, and his two-year imprisonment in Newgate (where, for a substantial sum, he occupied a private suite in the house of the sheriff, lived with his family, entertained visitors, and conducted his myriad affairs, including the publication of the *Register*); the success of the first two-penny edition of the *Register* in 1816 and his flight to America when he feared prosecution again; his return in 1819 and his championing of Queen Caroline in one of the great *causes célèbres* of the time (in which radicals and the lower classes enthusiastically rallied to the side of an undistinguished, unattractive, self-indulgent queen against her equally undistinguished, unattractive, and self-indulgent spouse); another trial for sedition in 1831 resulting in a hung jury; and his final successful bid (after several that were unsuccessful) for a seat in the Reformed Parliament, which he held briefly until his death in 1835. Interspersed with the narrative are the complicated details of his financial affairs, bankruptcies, lawsuits, business ventures, landholdings, and publications, and the still more complicated details of his feuds with government officials, members of parliament, reformers, and radicals.

In unravelling all these episodes and bringing them together into a comprehensive account of Cobbett's life, Spater has produced a work that will be indispen-

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sable to biographers and historians of the period. If he has done less justice to Cobbett's writings and ideas, one can sympathize with him, for these are even more complicated than his life. It has been estimated that Cobbett wrote—or rather dictated—some twenty million words, the equivalent of over a hundred good-sized books, on subjects as diverse as the poor laws and parliamentary reform, the manners and morals of young men ("and incidentally young women," as the title of one book put it), English grammar and the French language, brewing and bread-making, the Protestant Reformation and the history of the reign of George IV, the beauties of the countryside and the horrors of London, the "Great Wen."[2] Whatever the subject, even in the midst of his grammar lessons, Cobbett found occasion to animadvert upon his favorite themes: taxes, paper money, the national debt, sinecures, pensions, rotten boroughs, politicians, speculators, usurers, Jews. It was these writings that were his claim to power and fame in his own time and that are still his claim to our attention today.

If Cobbett's *History of the Protestant Reformation,* for example, was as influential as Spater says it was—we are told it had "an unparalleled sale throughout the western world," did more than any other work to "break down Protestant prejudice," and earned Cobbett a "large share of the credit" for Catholic emancipation—the substance of that book surely deserves more than the few sentences devoted to it here. And if it provoked as much controversy as Spater says, surely something more by way of critical analysis is called for than his assurance that it is a "mere quibble" to object to Cobbett's errors and exaggerations, that "if Cobbett too warmly urged that everything in the old religion had been good and that the change was made solely for sordid reasons, this was only a counterbalance to three centuries of erroneous and exaggerated propaganda to the opposite effect."

In fact, the *History of the Protestant Reformation* may not have been quite as influential as Spater says. At the time many advocates of Catholic emancipation thought it an embarrassment to the cause and counterproductive. Moreover, Cobbett himself was not consistently in favor of the measure; he publicly opposed it when it was introduced in parliament on the grounds that it did not provide for a thorough reform of the suffrage as a whole, and even after its passage Cobbett vacillated, first grudgingly supporting it, then attacking it, and attacking too those "mongrel Catholics" (including the "Liberator" Daniel O'Connell) who had fought so hard for it.

Other views of Cobbett's are less easy to rationalize or defend, and these tend to be belittled or ignored by his admirers. When G.D.H. Cole, in his influential biography of Cobbett more than half a century ago, neglected to make any mention of Cobbett's virulent anti-semitism, one could understand it, Cole himself having had a certain tolerance for that prejudice. But at this late date, especially after another of Cobbett's biographers, John Osborne, has given it the attention it deserves, the casual treatment it receives in Spater's book is less explicable. A single sentence in the first volume, half a dozen sentences in the second, and a few quotations tucked away in footnotes at the back of the book hardly seem adequate for a subject Cobbett himself made so much of. The Jews occupied a prominent place in his demonology, the "System" run by tax-collectors, stock-jobbers (brokers), fund-holders (holders of government bonds), moneylenders, middlemen, usurers, speculators, and parasites who were ruining old England. This was not the casual, garden variety of anti-semitism common at the time. Cobbett's anti-semitism was more passionate and persistent. Even when the objects of his aversion happened to be non-Jews, he managed to subsume them under the species of

2 Cobbett's *Rural Rides* has just been brought out in a new edition by Holt, Rinehart & Winston: 224 pages, $22.95

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Jews: Christian brokers and bankers were "Jewish Christians," usurers were "Jews in soul though Christians by profession," Quakers were "broad-brimmed Jews," a dealer in corn was a "self-styled Christian who acts the part of Jew or Quaker."

Nor was it only the Jews' role (or fancied role) in the economy that offended Cobbett. Although he was not himself especially religious, he denounced, with all the fervor of a primitive believer, the "Christ killers," and he took time out from his campaign for parliamentary reform to publish a pamphlet, *Good Friday; or the Murder of Jesus Christ by the Jews,* accusing the Jews, among other things, of crucifying Jesus in effigy twice a year. That pamphlet was not an aberration of youth; it was written in 1830 in his most radical period. Three years later he opposed the bill which would have permitted Jews to sit in parliament. "Suppose," he noted, "it was proposed to us to admit a race of *cannibals* to these powers, should we have a right to do it? *Jew* has always been synonymous with *sharper, cheat, rogue.* This has been the case with no *other race* of mankind." (The italics are Cobbett's.) Spater does not quote these comments or allude to his opposition to this bill. Instead, he concludes his brief discussion of this subject by saying that while Cobbett did not believe that Jews should be "encouraged" neither did he want them "persecuted." In fact (as Spater observes in a footnote), he did suggest that they be banished from England; he approved of the anti-Jewish laws promulgated by the Tsar of Russia and the King of Prussia; and he regarded the persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages as one of the more endearing features of those happy times.

The subject is important in itself, of course, but also because it illuminates Cobbett's notion of the "System" that was so hateful and so peculiarly epitomized by the Jews. While some of the demons of the "Old Corruption"—pensioners, politicians, office-holders, and courtiers—were not notably Jewish, others—tax-collectors, moneylenders, stock-jobbers, land-speculators, and merchants—were, or so Cobbett thought. He did not try to reconcile his belief in private property and the unlimited right to acquire, accumulate, and inherit property with his strenuous objections to the sale of some of that property to parvenus and "foreigners." Nor did he explain why farmers and landlords could legitimately receive a profit but not the wholesalers of grain—or, indeed, how an agricultural economy, or any economy, could function without such "middlemen." Sometimes he declared all foreign trade to be valueless and detrimental to the country, at other times he conceded that commerce was a necessary part of an advanced civilization. In one issue of the *Register,* written at the height of the Luddite riots, he argued that machine-breaking was no solution to the problem of the workers, that machinery, whether on the farm or in industry, was actually a boon, since it relieved the worker of the most arduous kind of labor and permitted him to enjoy more plentiful and cheaper goods. In this same tract he cited statistics demonstrating that "middlemen" (the miller and baker) took a very small profit for their labors and he wondered how they managed on that modest return. The real evils, he insisted, were not machines or middlemen but "wholly and solely" taxes and paper money. Later, however, he reverted to form and gave full rein to his animus against machinery, industry, commerce, and trade.

Long before he had so much as seen a factory Cobbett described the "hell-holes" in which thousands of miserable creatures were locked up for fourteen hours a day without food, water, or fresh air, "hotbeds of vice and corruption" in which the most heinous sins were committed. (He once suggested that the government encouraged the growth of these factories because large manufacturing "congregations" were more easily taxed than the dispersed units of the old domestic industry.) He was finally prevailed upon to visit a few factories, but he refused to go into any more on the grounds "that I had no understanding of the matter, that the wondrous things that are performed in these places only serve, when I behold them, to withdraw my mind from things which I do understand."

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What Cobbett did claim to "understand" was the world of his youth—or rather that world recalled through the rosy mists of later years—when the cottages of agricultural laborers were furnished with curtains and featherbeds, adorned with brass and pewter, filled with objects "worth possessing and worth preserving." In a much quoted passage he said that he wished for nothing more than to "see the poor men of England what the poor men of England were when I was born." Less often quoted are Cobbett's other statements praising the good old times when "all was in order" and "everyone was in his place" and all people were "fashioned to due subordination from their infancy." Much is made, and properly so, of Cobbett's defense of the old poor law, the system of poor relief going back to Elizabethan times which, according to Cobbett's idiosyncratic reading of English history, was part of the Reformation settlement. But not enough is said (here or in most accounts of Cobbett) of his argument—hotly disputed by other radicals at the time—that poverty was natural and necessary and that the poor would not work except under the pressure of poverty. He was an ardent proponent of manhood suffrage, the right of the poor to participate in the making of laws and (perhaps more important for Cobbett) the imposing of taxes. But he specifically disclaimed any right to economic or social equality. Equality of wealth was contrary to "the order of the world and the decrees of God"; it was right and proper that "people in the lower walks of life should carry themselves respectfully towards those whose birth, or superior talent, or industry, have placed above themselves." These were sentiments not of the early Tory Cobbett, the Cobbett of "Porcupine" fame, but of the later radical Cobbett, the self-styled "Poor Man's Friend."

Hazlitt described Cobbett as "a kind of fourth estate in the politics of the country. . . unquestionably the most powerful political writer of the present day." But Hazlitt did not find it easy to define the power or influence of a writer as capricious and inconstant as he thought Cobbett—"like a young and lusty bridegroom that divorces a favourite speculation every morning, and marries a new one every night." Spater, having a simpler, less problematic view of Cobbett, also takes a simpler measure of his influence: "We must credit Cobbett for his influence on future generations or for his percipience, or both, because most of the major remedial legislation relating to state and church urged by Cobbett and opposed by the ministers of the day, except his proposals relating to the debt, were eventually enacted into law by parliament." A footnote documents that claim by citing Cobbett's views on "pensions and sinecures, universal suffrage, the ballot, the Septennial Act, military flogging, the sinking fund, civil servants in parliament, the game laws, equitable taxation, tithes, clerical nonresidence, multiple livings, the corn laws, the poor laws, factory laws, labor unions, laws relating to the press." It is an impressive list—and a classical example of the fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. It is as if no one else before, during, or after Cobbett had urged the same reforms; as if Burke, half a century before, had not made a major proposal for the elimination of pensions and sinecures; as if, even earlier, Cartwright had not started the movement for manhood suffrage (Cobbett explicitly opposed female suffrage), the secret ballot, and annual parliaments; as if Paine had not exposed the inequities of the "English system of finance"; as if Smith and scores of others had not argued for more "equitable taxation" (Smith advocated "proportional" taxation, Cobbett opposed it); as if the unstamped, illegal newspapers in the early 1830s had not dramatized the cause of a free press by flouting the tax (Cobbett took no part in this campaign, his *Political Register* being a stamped legal paper selling for a respectable sixpence)—and so on with all the items on this list, every one of which had long been the concern of radicals, reformers, and statesmen of every persuasion.

Any serious consideration of influence must take account of failures as well as successes, of reforms or changes favored by Cobbett which did not come about either in

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his time or afterwards. Here one might come up with an equally impressive list (apart from the national debt mentioned by Spater): annual parliaments, the restoration of the old poor law, the abolition of paper money, the reduction of the government bureaucracy, the reduction of foreign trade, the elimination of factories, the revival of "cottage" industry in a predominantly agricultural economy. These were not "crotchets" on the order of Cobbett's diatribes against tea and potatoes (which he held responsible for the enervation and degradation of the working classes). They were among his main causes and passions; they were what he stood for and what he was known to stand for. And they were never taken seriously, let alone implemented, in his time or afterwards.

Or consider the measures that were passed in his time, thanks to the efforts of others (sometimes his arch enemies) and often over his vehement objections. The two major reforms of the early 1830s, which occupied him and his contemporaries more than any other issues, were the Reform Act of 1832 (a moderate reform of the suffrage) and the New Poor Law of 1834 (drastically revising the old poor law and limiting relief), both of which Cobbett passionately opposed. A third, the abolition of slavery in the colonies, he grudgingly voted for, mainly, he explained, because his constituency favored it, but he played no part in the movement that finally led to that reform; indeed, he ridiculed those who were concerned with the liberation of "fat and lazy and laughing and singing and dancing negroes" when English workers were in a worse state of slavery. (No slave, he insisted, was ever so degraded as to be forced to eat potatoes, as the English worker was.) Nor did he contribute to a host of earlier reforms: the abolition of the income tax and the reduction of other taxes and tariffs, legal and penal reforms, the establishment of the police force, the admission of Dissenters to public office (he hated Methodists, Quakers, and Unitarians almost as much as Jews), the legalization of trade unions, the factory acts limiting the hours of work of women and children. He did favor the last two measures but without much enthusiasm. He thought strikes inexpedient and unions irrelevant because the evils they hoped to remedy were not the fault of any master but of the fiscal and political system; and he could not bring much passion to the cause of factory reform when he abhorred the very thought of factories and wanted only to restore the domestic industry of earlier times. One other issue, which was a priority for most reformers and radicals, was the education of the working classes, and here Cobbett set himself against the prevailing opinion. He opposed not only any public education for the poor but any formal schooling whatsoever, private or public, religious or secular, insisting that the only worthwhile kind of education was that acquired at home in the bosom of the family—hardly a feasible alternative for those who were themselves illiterate.

The fact is that the major reforms of the time were inspired by other kinds of reformers and radicals (and conservatives as well) under the influence of very different kinds of ideas—by Evangelicals and Unitarians, Philosophic Radicals (utilitarians) and Tory Radicals, Whigs and liberal Tories. Many of them came about through the efforts of politicians whom Cobbett execrated (Pitt, Peel, Huskisson, Brougham) or of reformers whom he reviled (Bentham, Place, Romilly, Attwood, O'Connell, Sadler, Ashley). Nor was he associated with (or even well disposed to) any of the radical movements which enjoyed some degree of support in some circles: Owenism, agrarian socialism, Ricardian socialism. He was part of no movement, no party, no sect, not even a coterie. He had no political allies, as he had no personal friends.

And yet, and yet. . . Cobbett *was* a major influence in his own time and for years to come. It is not an influence easily defined or measured, certainly not in terms of legislation, institutions, organizations, or ideologies. But there is no doubt that it was there, that his books and journals were enormously popular, that his name was a "household

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word," that the government feared him and masses of people revered him, that after his death he became, together with Paine, the symbol of radical protest.

Here, perhaps, is the key to his influence. Cobbett was the protester *par excellence,* protesting against all the changes in this early period of industrialism that were causing so much anxiety and distress (changes that others predicted would prove beneficial to the poor but that at the time were ominous), protesting against the powers-that-be for not setting things right, protesting against the loss of that mythical golden age when life seemed simpler and happier—protesting with a passion that overrode inconsistency, triviality, puerility, illogicality, ignorance, even malice. It was the passion of the prophet who prophesies not about the future but about the past, who inveighs against what is or what is to be in the name of what was or what might have been. In any practical, programmatic sense, Cobbett must be judged utterly ineffectual in his own time and utterly irrelevant to the future. But he was effective in expressing and validating the discontent and fears of those who took no satisfaction in the present and had no confidence in the future. Indeed, his strength lay precisely in the extent to which he went against the "spirit of the age" and the "wave of the future." He was a Jeremiah not a Moses, a moralist not a legislator, an iconoclast not a reformer. Henry James said of Carlyle that his style perfectly suited his thought: "It is not defensible but it is victorious." So one might say of Cobbett—of his thought as well as his style.

It is only thus that one can understand Cobbett. *Rural Rides* was his most popular book and the one most accessible to the modern reader. Yet even here an idyllic picture of the rich, beautiful countryside dotted with grazing oxen is followed by a typical, truly malevolent passage:

> But the great pleasure with which the contemplation of this fine site was naturally calculated to inspire me was more than counterbalanced by the thought that these fine oxen, this primest of human food was, aye, every mouthful of it, destined to be devoured in the Wen, and that too, for the far greater part, by the Jews, loan-jobbers, tax-eaters, and their base and prostituted followers. . . literary as well as other wretches, who, if suffered to live at all, ought to partake of nothing but awful food, and ought to come but one cut before the dogs and cats!

In the case of Cobbett, as of Carlyle, it is important to face up to ideas which today seem "not defensible," not only in order to understand the nature of the influence exercised by two of the most influential men of the time but also in order to understand the nature of the people over whom they had that extraordinary influence.

Carlyle's admirers looked to him for a critique of those liberal, progressive, enlightened ideas that they themselves were committed to but that they suspected were intellectually shallow and morally dubious. Cobbett's admirers looked to him for a critique of a "System" they did not understand but distrusted, a system more easily comprehended and condemned in terms of corrupt officials, greedy merchants, and un-Christian Jews than in the terms proposed by the political economists: technological change, the forces of supply and demand, the pressure of population (Cobbett denied to the end, in spite of the evidence of successive censuses, that the population had increased). It is a moot point whether Cobbett merely reflected the prevailing populist demonology—tax-collectors, moneylenders, stock-jobbers, middlemen—or revived a dormant one. G.K. Chesterton cited Cobbett's hatred of Jews as evidence of his true "Englishness," his feeling for the "traditions of the past and the instincts of people." Maybe so. It is not an issue the biographer or even the historian can resolve.

More to the point is the fact that, whatever the appeal of Cobbett or Carlyle, whatever subterranean "instincts" they drew upon, whatever dissatisfactions they gave voice to, whatever private doubts they dramatized and legitimized, they did not in fact prevail. What did prevail, for the working classes as well as

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for the intellectuals, was that liberal, progressive, rational, pragmatic, phlegmatic temper that was the very antithesis of Cobbett and Carlyle, a temper that accommodated itself to the changes in the economy and in the society and made the best of them.

When Cobbett died *The Times* ("the bloody old *Times,*" as Cobbett would say) paid tribute to the "self-taught peasant" who was "a more extraordinary Englishman than any other of his time."

> Though a vigilant observer of the age, and a strenuous actor in it, he lay upon the earth as a loose and isolated substance. He was incorporated with no portion of our political or social frame. He belonged neither to principles, to parties, nor to classes.... He was an English episode, and nothing more, as greater men have been.

It was an ambiguous tribute but an accurate one. And it serves as well for Carlyle or for any other apocalyptic thinker who goes against the grain of the "English temper."

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Down and out: the stories of Ann Beattie

by Joshua Gilder

Reading Ann Beattie's new collection of short stories, *The Burning House,*[1] one notes with interest that the divorce rate in Beattieland is nearing one hundred per cent. (Two, or about ten per cent, of the marriages dissolve when husbands desert their wives to become rock stars.) In what may or may not be a related phenomenon, Valium has replaced pot as the drug of choice. One retrograde, it is true, is trying to wean himself off his dependency on tranquilizers and back onto marijuana, but he represents the exception to the general rule of a thirty- to fifty-milligram day.

At the age of thirty-five, Beattie seems to have succeeded John Cheever and John Updike in the pages of *The New Yorker* as the chronicler of middle-class lives of quiet desperation. By some cabal of editors and critics (who are generally much older, so it doesn't apply to *them*), she has been designated the voice of her generation. A more cheerless voice it would be hard to imagine.

Beattie's staple characters are the dead-end kids of the Seventies and Eighties; born to privilege, they've in some curious way internalized the recession. They're not socially or economically blocked but psychologically burnt out; they drag themselves around her stories like worn sneakers sucking up the mud of despair, making little squishy, sighing noises as they go. They listen to Dylan records and think about the good old days and try to summon the energy to roll a joint. Their lives hold no possibilities because, like the friends sitting around a Columbus Avenue apartment in *Falling in Place,* they're simply too *wrecked* to order out for pizza.

This is one reason why Beattie People never seem to do much of anything. In *Chilly Scenes of Winter,* Charles, who has some bureaucratic job shuffling papers for the state government and lives in a house left to him by his aunt, spends the whole novel mooning about his girl friend—she's living with another man—and coming down with the flu. (It's a long, flu-infested winter of the soul in Beattieland.) The narrator of "Jacklighting," one of the stories in Beattie's new collection, thinks of a friend fatally injured in a motorcycle accident: ". . . I wonder if today would be anything like those birthdays of the past, or whether we'd have bogged down so hopelessly that even his childish enthusiasm would have little effect. Wynn is sure that he's having a crisis and that it's not the real thing with his student because he also has a crush on Pammy. . . . Spence bakes french bread too long, finds out that he's lightly tapping a rock, sits on the kitchen counter, puts his hands over his face and cries. . . . I get depressed and think that if the birds could talk, they'd say that they didn't enjoy flying." No doubt about it, the Sixties are over.

Apparently, many critics feel that Beattie draws a fairly accurate picture of a certain sort of lost, counterculture wastrel, though the more grandiose make gaseous statements

1 Random House, 272 pages, $12.95.

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about "life as it is lived" and "*the* failing connection between men and women" (italics mine). This begs the question of the distinction between literature and journalism, and even as reporting these stories don't cut very deep. Certainly many people play Dylan records and smoke pot and feel hopeless, but it's interesting to note that readers more often than not identify her characters with *other* people, a younger generation, friends (*friends!*), aging hippies they have known. This goes for Beattie, too. As she said in a *New York Times* interview, "I guess it's true . . . that I'm more interested in alienation than I personally feel alienated." And when the interviewer asked Beattie about her status as a counterculture journalist, she became quite hostile. "I've gotten very hostile to that response to my work," she said.

> I mean, people never say things like, "James Joyce, he was pretty mired in Dublin wasn't he? He really stayed pretty close to home, didn't he." I mean, if that's what you have to say about Joyce, that's a pretty reductive approach to the work. And I feel the same way about my work. If people want to take that as a stepping stone for what I'm writing about, well, of course it's there. It's certainly true that people I write about are essentially my age, and so they were a certain age in the 60's and had certain common experiences and tend to listen to the same kind of music and get stoned and wear the same kind of clothes. I realize it's all there, but what I've always hoped for is that somebody will then start talking more about the meat and bones of what I'm writing about.

Perhaps the best place to begin a carving up is with Beattie's technique. It's a little unfair, classifying Beattie with Updike and Cheever. While there are similarities in the fey lyricism of all three, the fiction of her predecessors, no matter how dreary the lives of its characters, is enlightened by a belief in the redemptive powers of art. Whatever their merits in this respect, this places Updike and Cheever in a wholly different order from Beattie. The one thing that her fiction says loud and clear is that there is no redemption from despair and hopelessness, especially not in art.

Beattie's anhedonic writing replicates in prose the affectless inner life of her characters, people who do their best with Valium and pot to anesthetize their emotions and scramble their brains. They generally succeed, too, but no matter how high the dosage they can't ward off a creeping feeling of despondency. It would be hard to imagine a more despondent prose than Beattie's: sentences are short and flat, as if it just didn't seem worthwhile to continue; descriptions, when they don't degenerate into lists, are tentative and vague, as if even looking carefully took too much effort. (Beattie spelled out her ideas on descriptive technique in the same *Times* interview: ". . . I figure if they're playing John Coltrane records and are stoned, they're not wearing anything from Brooks Brothers. . . .") Ideas trail off and sputter out before they can become fully formed.

Considering the brevity of Beattie's, and her characters', attention span, it's no wonder she favors the short-story form. Another reason, of course, is that it avoids the aesthetic problem she encountered in her two novels: boring the reader. Her characters, no matter how many pages they're given, are simply not going to develop. And they're not all that interesting to begin with. Within a few lines they've exhausted all they have to say—the lame, pot-induced humor, the it's-such-a-tragic-world-but-I'm-bucking-up sarcasm, the obligato of nostalgic references to the Sixties—and a sentence or two suffices to give us a fairly complete rundown of their fantasy life, again a wistful longing for the Sixties. It helps if they don't hang around too long.

But Beattie's technique, though it may not be very skilled, is nearly perfectly suited to her purpose. This, to put it briefly, is the avoidance at all costs of meaning; not *meaning* in any exalted sense of the word, simply identifiable thoughts. This is not necessarily an easy task; allow enough words to assemble freely in one place and one has to be constantly on guard that they don't organize themselves into an idea. Even in the short-story form this can be a problem.

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Pot is the answer. When it seems that a Beattie character is either going to have to finally say something or shut up, he usually rolls himself a joint, smokes himself into a funk, and becomes, if possible, even more incoherent and silly than before, the jumble of disjointed thoughts building until it ends in complete bewilderment on all sides. When a group of Beattie People gather together and toke up, as they so often do, the narrative turns into a veritable orgy of non sequiturs. Like literary models of entropy, Beattie's stories progress toward ever greater confusion and the dissolution of sense.

Pot smoking is only a last ditch maneuver, however. If we follow the course of one story, "Happy" (which—heavy irony here—is about an unhappy marriage), we discover in Beattie's work a wealth of what we shall call for the purpose of analysis *modes of avoidance*. We start a few paragraphs into the story, in the mode of *confusion*. The narrator drives to the dump and takes her dog along:

> Bob Dylan is singing on the tape deck: "May God bless and keep you always, may all your wishes come true . . ."
>
> "Back her up!" the dump man hollers . . . the dog barks madly, baring his teeth.
>
> "Come on, she'll get up that little incline," the dump man hollers.
>
> The wheels whirr, the dog is going crazy. When the car stops I open my door, call, "Thank you!" and tiptoe through the mush. I take the plastic bag filled with garbage and another pair of shoes that didn't work out and throw it feebly, aiming at the top of the heap. I miss by a mile, but the dump man has lost interest. Only the dog cares. He is wildly agitated.
>
> "Please," I say to the dog when I get in the car.
>
> "May you always be courageous," Dylan sings.

Leaving aside the question of why we must accompany her to the dump in the first place, ignoring the pseudo-ironic touches provided by Dylan's lyrics and the clumsy, to put it kindly, dialogue writing—all this aside, the striking thing here is the utter scatterbrained confusion generated by the four-way conversation between dog, dump man, Dylan, and narrator. And the characters are fairly representative of a Beattie get-together: they manifest a remarkably short attention span, are hyperactive or obsessed with trivia, and/or sing Dylan songs. In this case, one character is a dog and one a tape deck, but it makes little difference.

Beattie can keep this sort of thing going on for pages. This time, however, she switches modes quickly from *confusion* to *marking time*. The woman comes back home to watch the second-hand revolve on her clock: ". . . the second-hand on the clock seems to be going very fast. . . ." (Several characters spend their time this way in Beattie's new collection; she's establishing it as a major theme in her work.) The mode then switches back for a moment to *confusion*—an anonymous caller asking, "Will you trust me?" and asking for directions (is this symbolic?) to her house, but refusing to give his name. Earlier she had been disoriented when a friend called and greeted her with, "One banana, two banana, three banana, four. . ." (Beattie's characters are always doing wild and crazy things like this to show what free spirits they are. In another story, one places a jar of Lipton Iced Tea next to a scraggly lemon tree, "a joke, put there by Wynn to encourage it to grow more fruit." A joke, evidently.) The story then moves on to one of Beattie's favorites, *lists*:

> I go to the medicine cabinet and take out a brandy snifter of pills. My husband's bottle of Excedrine looks pristine. My brandy snifter is cut glass, and belonged to my grandfather. It's easy to tell my pills apart because they're all different colors: yellow Valium, blue Valium, green Donnatal. I never have to take those unless I go through a whole week without eating Kellogg's All-Bran.
>
> *
>
> "A Bear is ringing the front doorbell."

The asterisk signals another modal shift, this time to *cute*. The bear turns out to be the

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anonymous telephone caller of before, dressed up in a costume to sing a "happy birthday" greeting.

Well, you can very easily dither away a whole story this way, and that is exactly what Beattie does. The rest of the story the narrator spends taking Valium and drinking vermouth (the *comatose* mode) and waiting for her husband to come home from work. Part of the point of this exercise, of course, is to describe the appallingly oppressed condition of suburban housewives ("Say you have a nice life," her husband commands her at the end, just in case the message slipped by), and in this respect the story is some fraction more issue-oriented than usual. Otherwise, it is a thoroughly typical Beattie story; any one of these paragraphs could be transplanted to any other Beattie story and no one would be the wiser. The housewife's listless depression and time-frittering are the distinguishing features of the Beattie-oid.

We haven't yet discussed Beattie's lyrical mode, perhaps her most important. It's easily spotted because it is in such marked contrast to the rest of her hangdog prose. (This in fact is an identifying trait of much *New Yorker* writing, a stunted use of language alternating with sodden bursts of lyricism.) Beattie usually saves the lyrical mode for a sort of kicker at the end—always wistful, always hopeless. She has told interviewers that she feels her endings to be the most important part of her stories, and that she knows when she has a good one because it "feels right." The feelings, more often than not, are of distancing and disembodiment, the desire, mentioned at the end of "Afloat," "more overwhelming than love . . . for one brief moment, to get off the earth."

"The Burning House" wraps up as a husband tells his wife he is leaving her to become "a star."

> ". . . I'm going to tell you something about [men]. Men think they're Spider-Man and Buck Rogers and Superman. You know what we all feel inside that you don't feel? That we're going to the stars."
>
> He takes my hand. "I'm looking down on all of this from space," he whispers. "I'm already gone."

In "The Cinderella Waltz," Milo has left his wife and young daughter to live with his true love, Bradley. The daughter sometimes hides in the closet when her father comes to pick her up for their weekends together baking quiche in the city; nevertheless, she's upset when Milo, in his typically self-absorbed way, announces that he's taking a job in San Francisco. He comforts his daughter with a promise that she can come to visit, and the story concludes with the wife imagining them "in a glass elevator, not long from now, going up and up, with the people below getting smaller and smaller, until they finally disappear."

The sweetly pathetic girl in "Gravity," whose lover has another lover, poignantly remembers each of the buttons she has lost from the old L.L. Bean jacket he gave her and clings ferociously to his hand when they're walking out together. She refers to it as "the hand."

> He strokes my jacket. "You've got your security blanket. Let me keep all the parts together. On the outside, at least."
>
> Disembodied, that hand would be a symbol from Magritte: a castle on a rock, floating over the ocean; a green apple without a tree.
>
> Alone, I'd know it anywhere.

This preciousness is also found in the titles: *Falling in Place,* with its suggestion of perpetual dislocation; "Learning to Fall," with its resigned pessimism (the story ends: ". . . what will happen can't be stopped. Aim for grace."); "Afloat," with that desire, evidently shared by the Buck Rogers husband, to get off the earth.

When grounded, Beattie keeps her lyricism going by cooking up metaphorical soufflés. (They deflate with a rush of hot air when a loud noise is made nearby.) In "Greenwich Time," a divorced father who wants to obtain custody of his son wonders, "If there is another life, what if something goes wrong

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and he is reincarnated as a camel and Ben as a cloud and there is just no way for the two of them to get together?" Of the friend injured in the motorcycle accident in "Jacklighting," ". . . there was a red scar down the side of his head that seemed as out of place as a line dividing a highway out west, a highway that nobody traveled anyway." And which probably goes nowhere too, right? It's oh-so-poetically sad, isn't it? Beattie yanks at the heartstrings and they slap back against her metaphors with a dull, pitiful "thwuck."

Maybe they've gotten soggy from all the water Beattie splashes around her stories. One can always tell she is getting lyrical when things start to get wet. In "Learning to Fall" this clues us into what might otherwise not appear to be lyrical material: "One time my grocery list fell out of my book into the water and I saw the letters bleed and haze and disappear as it went under." If the reader wonders why Beattie is getting poetic about a grocery list, it all leads back to an image of The Blurring Heart. In "Running Dreams": "Barnes has explained, by drawing a picture on his napkin, how a triple by-pass operation is done. Holly accidentally knocks over Barnes' glass, and the drawing of the heart blurs in the spilled water." One way to deal with emotion is to drown it. Images of the watery diffusion swamp Beattie's stories. The narrator of "Girl Talk" feels her first contractions while sitting down to cocktails at the house of her boyfriend's family:

> I am really at some out-of-the-way beach house, with a man I am not married to and people I do not love, in labor.
>
> Sven squeezes a lemon into the pitcher. Smoky drops fall into the soda and wine. I smile, the first to hold out my glass.

The next line, the kicker, is the little aphorism, "Pain is relative." To that old question, "What can we know?", we can now add, "What can we truly feel?" and affect follows intellect down the tubes of Beattie's fiction.

What, ultimately, is the purpose of all this? What, as Durkheim would say, is Beattie's "world view"? What, as Marx would want to know, are the class interests she is representing? What, in short, is the matter with this girl?

The answer to the first two questions may be found in a look at Beattie's home territory, *The New Yorker*. At first glance it might seem strange that those prim, almost prissy pages would find Beattie's stoned-out counterculture losers such good company, but on closer inspection one notices a certain correspondence between the magazine's fiction and its editorial stance. In its Talk of the Town pieces and political and economic articles, *The New Yorker* consistently sings a requiem for the end of expansion, picturing a world used up and worn out and urging us to accept "limits to growth." According to the magazine's prophets of entropy, this isn't just a momentary fix we're in, it's a Law of Nature: the whole universe is winding down and we're living on the tail end of a slow cosmic fizzle.

One can see the world that is sketched out in such a bleak scenario populated in Beattie's fiction. Her characters have adopted the fashionable attitudes of the New Class with a vengeance; in a very personal way, they have run out of resources and accepted the limits to growth.

The exhaustion of resources in Beattieland is best illustrated by the fact that her characters are constitutionally incapable of talking *to* one another; they talk past each other in endless monologues about nothing. (Narratively, this functions as Beattie's *confusion* mode.) The pregnant woman of "Girl Talk" asks her boyfriend and the father of her child whether he will marry her and is answered with a pointless story about some hippie's "acid rap" on the crosstown bus; Nina, in *Falling in Place,* feeling guilty about the shooting of her lover's daughter, gets a stoned spiel from her friend about Huey Newton and modular furniture; in "Burning House," Amy tells Freddy Fox about her husband's infidelity and he talks to her about avocado pits and Nixon's face. People with worries and problems reach out and are met with the witless banter of "friends" whose

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minds are glued to trivia and too distracted to hear anyway. But ultimately they can't respond, because they simply don't have the emotional resources that empathy requires. And though the women mentioned above may feel some frustration with their friends, they take no offense; they don't themselves have the resources to respect, or even to acknowledge, their own pain.

Perhaps the most telling of Beattie's emotional economies is her characters' inability to muster the energy to pass beyond adolescence. Their limit to growth is about age eighteen, which among other things explains their nostalgia for the Sixties, when the whole culture seemed to have regressed into adolescence. At the same time, the realities of childhood are in a fundamental sense denied. In "The Burning House," Amy's son, who had been planning to spend the night at a friend's house, decides he wants to come home. The friend's mother, Marilyn, calls Amy (who is the narrator):

> "I'll be right over," I say. "He's not upset now, is he?"
>
> "No, but he's dropped enough hints that he doesn't think he can make it through the night. . . . Six years old," Marilyn says. "Wait till he grows up and gets that feeling."

Children, we see, are simply little hopeless cases instead of big hopeless cases. But worse than this, children seem to exist for adults primarily as objects onto which they can project their despair. The father in *Falling in Place* speaks to his children in words just dripping with sarcasm of the sort that only an adult could understand. Directed toward a child, they border on the sadistic. "Winter: 1978" ends with this bedtime story:

> Benton told [Jason, a young child] this fact of evolution: that one day dinosaurs shook off their scales and sucked in their breath until they became much smaller. This caused the dinosaur's brains to pop through their skulls. The brains were called antlers, and the dinosaurs deer. That was why deer had such sad eyes, Benton told Jason—because they were once something else.

Curiously cute and bitter, this ending must have felt exactly "right" to Beattie. What it's saying of course is that children have to learn that the only comfort to be found in this world is in the acceptance of despair. When Beattie's adults adopt this stance it is merely tiresome posturing and self-indulgence; when it involves children it turns nasty.

One assumes that, for Beattie, Freud and all that early childhood stuff are obsolete. There is no sense that psychologically brutalizing a child, or, as Beattie would say, playing "mind games" with him, may have some effect on his future happiness. This is in part because Beattie's literature is fundamentally anti-psychological. This may seem an odd thing to say about stories so laden, so absolutely dripping with sickly sweet Angst and every kind of mental blight; but a neurotic literature isn't necessarily a psychological one.

The unanimous immaturity of Beattie's adults and the adultomorphization of her children are, finally, ways of helping her deny the reality of experience. There is no process, no growth, no personal history. All is stasis; experience has no meaning: nothing affects us, nothing changes us. That's why nothing seems to happen in Beattieland. "I have had this revelation," says the narrator of "Jacklighting," "that you can look at something, close your eyes and see it again, and still know nothing." And from "Sunshine and Shadow": "Whatever revelations he had had, were long gone . . . he couldn't remember his conclusions. Or, if he could, they no longer seemed to have any context." From "The Burning House": "I have known everybody in the house for years, and as time goes by I know them all less and less." The theater darkens; reality seems to evaporate as Beattie shuts down her synapses one by one. Detached from all sensible awareness, she floats listlessly in the void.

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Music

Stravinsky: re-recording history

by Samuel Lipman

Not surprisingly, the present centennial of Igor Stravinsky's birth has brought forth a variety of historical documentation on the composer's life and work. Some of this documentation has extended as far as gala performances of the Russian master's music: the Metropolitan Opera performed a Stravinsky triple bill, beginning with the *Rite of Spring* (1911-13), continuing with an opera, *The Nightingale* (1908-14), and concluding with the semi-staged oratorio, *Oedipus Rex* (1926-27). And commemorating its long association with the composer, George Balanchine's New York City Ballet put on a Stravinsky Festival in June including some of the later and less appreciated compositions.

Major celebratory attention, however, was focused on Stravinsky's career and life, the story of which comes to us again, as it has over the past generation, through the mind and pen of the master's faithful amanuensis and factotum, Robert Craft. Following on the heels of Craft's enormous—and handsome—1978 collection of letters and memorabilia, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (assembled in collaboration with Stravinsky's widow, Vera), three volumes of the composer's Craft-assembled recollections have been re-issued in paperback: *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (1958), *Memories and Commentaries* (1959), and *Expositions and Developments* (1962).[1] While these books will remain of great interest to connoisseurs of artists' lives, the extent of Stravinsky's participation in them—and therefore their exact authenticity—seems in as much doubt as ever.

Whatever their historical validity, the picture of Stravinsky these autobiographical productions conjure up is of a grandly charming man whose genius is only highlighted by his capricious irascibility. A rather different picture of Stravinsky emerges, however, in the first volume of the *Selected Correspondence*.[2] Although Craft served as editor here too and supplied commentaries, the authenticity of this material at least seems unquestionable. The bulk of the book is composed of letters between Stravinsky and such notables as the French composer Maurice Delage, the Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet, the Russian editor V.V. Derzhanovsky, Jean Cocteau, Nadia Boulanger, Lincoln Kirstein, W.H. Auden, and Craft himself. Through excerpts from the letters of Stravinsky's first wife, Catherine, the first

1 *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, by Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, Simon & Shuster, 688 pages, $35. *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, by Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, University of California Press, 140 pages, $4.95; *Memories and Commentaries*, by Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, University of California Press, 188 pages, $5.95; *Expositions and Developments*, by Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, University of California Press, 168 pages, $5.95

2 *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence*, Vol. I, edited and with commentaries by Robert Craft. Alfred A. Knopf, 471 pages, $27.50

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section provides a glimpse into the composer's tangled personal life; the remainder gives tedious coverage to a lifelong obsession with questions of business and career.

As our picture of Stravinsky gains in authenticity it loses much of its charm. Stravinsky seems to have been as concerned with himself as was even that colossal egoist Richard Wagner; like Wagner, he was calculating in money matters and given to using for his own purposes anyone who came into his line of sight. Craft has devoted many years to justifying this egoism at the same time he has copiously described it. It is a mark of both Craft's intellectual skill and his love for his mentor that the reader now ends up almost granting the basic premise: great composers have a right to be money-grubbing and to expect unlimited personal services from colleagues and friends as well.

If in matters of business and companionship Stravinsky emerges as no less blameworthy than other composers and musicians of his time, the fragments of the composer's correspondence with Catherine Stravinsky (1881-1939) are vastly damaging to our respect for the composer as a moral being. Marital infidelity is hardly unheard of among composers, but Stravinsky's was far from casual: for the last eighteen years of his marriage he carried on a barely clandestine affair with the woman who would become, scarcely more than a year after his wife's death, the second Mrs. Stravinsky. To make matters worse, the affair was in progress while Catherine was suffering from the progressive ravages of tuberculosis, which finally ended her life just before the outbreak of World War II.

Craft's description of the situation, though it hardly does justice to the ethical issues involved, epitomizes his cleansing approach to the flaws he finds in Stravinsky:

> Fifteen years after wedding Catherine, Stravinsky met and became infatuated with Vera de Bosset Sudeikina. Telling Catherine that he could not live without this other woman, he expected his wife not only to accept the triangular relationship but also to join him in admiring and befriending the younger woman. Since Catherine had always subordinated her wishes to her husband's, he correctly anticipated that she would do the same in this new situation. It may be said that she had no alternative, for her illness precluded a full participation in his life, and divorce between two people so closely united was unthinkable. But these pragmatic explanations are less important than that of her absolute devotion to Stravinsky and to what she saw as his divine creative gift.

To this redemptive story of the sacrifice woman pays to genius has now been added, to commemorate the centennial, a picture book documenting the idyllic relationship between the composer and the real (albeit belated) love of his life. Simply entitled *Igor and Vera Stravinsky: A Photograph Album,*[3] this book manages to include a normal-looking snapshot of Stravinsky naked at water's edge, along with many of the blissful couple arriving, departing, and just plain *sur le voyage.* There are studies of the couple at home and in hotels and of the Stravinskys working and sightseeing, eating and talking, middle-aged and old, sick and well, alone and accompanied by the famous. In a book whose photographs were chosen by Vera Stravinsky (and Rita McCaffrey), one is not surprised to find the composer's first wife absent. Also absent, however, are his four children by his first wife, to whom he was deeply, if capriciously, attached. It seems especially strange, in a book replete with musical allusions, to find no mention—even in the book's captions (written by Craft)—of the composer's younger son, Soulima, who frequently appeared as a soloist in Stravinsky's music, often under his father's baton.

Indeed, so beguiling is this presentation of artistic and personal life in words and pictures that one almost forgets that music is the *raison d'être* of a composer's career. This being so, the first task of a serious centennial celebration would seem to be, not providing

3 *Igor and Vera Stravinsky: A Photograph Album, 1921 to 1971.* Thames and Hudson, 144 pages, $19.95

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interesting and decorative books, but rather presenting the master's music in such a way that present and future generations may see his achievement both as it was and, in so far as such matters can be reconciled, as he wanted it to be perceived.

In Stravinsky's case, the material for accomplishing such a historiographic task exists in the vast phonographic legacy he spent almost half a century building. Stravinsky took his recordings seriously. There was in this seriousness, it is true, an admixture of commercial motives, but no composer can be expected to deny himself unnecessarily a conductor's fees and royalties. More important was Stravinsky's belief that *his* music could only suffer at the hands of other conductors, whose interpretations he saw as willful distortions advanced by performing celebrities for the sake of their own preferment. To this kind of self-indulgence Stravinsky counterposed an ideal of sober and accurate execution, involving the rigorous observation of the composer's notated instructions. And who could better know the composer's instructions—and their meanings—than the composer himself?

The result of Stravinsky's interest in this regard was the almost complete recording of his entire compositional output in performances in which he participated himself. Many of his works he recorded more than once. The *Rite of Spring,* for example, he recorded three times, in 1928, 1940, and 1960; the *Firebird* he recorded (in different versions) four times, first in 1927 and last forty years later, in 1967. Even the less popular pieces of his later years often received second performances under the composer's direction, taking advantage of whatever advances in audio technology had become available.

This nearly complete coverage of a composer's work, under the auspices of the leading record labels of the day, is doubtless due in part to Stravinsky's early fame; it is due also to his long life, stretching as it did from the beginnings of the recording process itself into the era of phonographic inclusiveness so characteristic of the 1950s and 1960s. Credit belongs as well to the record companies for appreciating Stravinsky's stature as early as the 1920s, and for taking the financial risks that recording his music necessarily entailed.

Now Columbia, the latest and most extensive of Stravinsky's recording affiliations, has issued a luxuriously boxed, thirty-one-record set of almost all his music in his own performances: *Igor Stravinsky: The Recorded Legacy.* The set has been assembled under the direction of Vera Zorina, the widow of Goddard Lieberson, a Columbia Records executive who was a close associate of Stravinsky's during the greater part of his association with Columbia. Miss Zorina's contact with the composer had begun even earlier, at the time of her marriage to George Balanchine and her own performances as a dancer in *Petrushka* and *Apollon Musagète.*

In general the set comprises re-issues of Stravinsky's last attempts to impose his conceptions of his works on posterity. Here, then, are the stereo discs made in the 1960s, most often with orchestras in New York and Los Angeles assembled specially for the occasion. Like all the other recordings of Stravinsky's work in the last twenty or so years of his life, these recordings were made with the help of Robert Craft, who served variously as a musical secretary, the rehearsal conductor who prepared the orchestra, and as a co-editor of the tapes when the final discs were being prepared. To round out the picture, Columbia has given us almost three full sides of Stravinsky in rehearsal and in conversation, talking about his life and work. So that history, too, will be paid its due, we are allowed to hear Stravinsky as a solo pianist in recordings from the 1920s and 1930s, and as an ensemble pianist (with violinist Joseph Szigeti) from 1945.

Columbia's presentation is elaborate: the pressings are imported, related works are grouped in separate sleeves, and a glossy souvenir booklet is provided, together with notes on individual compositions (in three languages) and illustrations. Everything necessary to the full appreciation of history and art—at a price of four hundred dollars—is here. Or is it?

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The answer is an almost unqualified no. Columbia has promised us Stravinsky's recorded legacy; of this legacy it has given only that part which it was convenient to assemble. As a result, what we are asked to view as history is all too often little more than a re-packaging of familiar performances which are—or recently were—widely available in the United States and (one assumes) in Europe.

The treatment in this set of Stravinsky's most famous work, the *Rite of Spring,* is a case in point. It is represented here by the composer's 1960 recording with a group of freelance musicians sailing under the name of the "Columbia Symphony Orchestra." This performance has been available as recently as this year in not one but three different packagings. As a musical achievement, this performance of the *Rite* is comfortable and pleasant, tonally lush, rhythmically flaccid, and clearly correct in detail more by virtue of the tape-splicer's art than by virtue of the discipline acquired through concert performance. If we listen to it without the sentimentality with which we customarily regard the productions of age and eminence, we cannot but feel it is an old man's performance (Stravinsky was seventy-seven at the time) of a young man's work.

Was this the most interesting rendition that Columbia could find to include in its tribute? There are two earlier Stravinsky recordings of the *Rite,* each with some claim to our consideration—and to that of history. Twenty years earlier he recorded his masterwork, not with a pick-up orchestra, but with the New York Philharmonic. This recording, too, was made for Columbia; it was issued first on 78 RPM discs, and then, around 1949, as one of the first long-playing records. As such it remained available until the advent of stereo recording in the late 1950s. (It was in order to provide a stereo version conducted by the composer that the 1960 record was made.) Tauter in rhythm, more energetic in direction and momentum, leaner in timbre, the 1940 performance is valuable as a document of Stravinsky's earlier and plainer conception of his work, and of his mature abilities as a conductor. It also has much to tell us about the state of the New York Philharmonic, then under the administration of John Barbirolli, as a performer of difficult contemporary music in the time between the strong regimes of Arturo Toscanini and Artur Rodzinski. Keeping in mind that playing errors on a recording could be corrected in 1940 only by remaking an entire four-minute-plus 78 RPM side, the performance remains a credit to both Stravinsky and the Philharmonic.

Vastly more praise, though of a different kind, can be given to Stravinsky's first discs of the *Rite.* They were made in Paris in 1928 and are valuable relics of the heroic age of orchestral recording. It is all too easy for us today to hear in this performance only some errors in execution caused by the relative newness of the work and the consequent insecurity of the players. But to do so would be to ignore much of present value for the sake of a merely surface accuracy.

Despite its obvious age,[4] this recording makes clear how different the performance it enshrines is from our customary contemporary fare. Its orientation, after all, is to the past, not the present. It was made a scant fifteen years after the *Rite*'s scandalous premiere. Here can be heard an orchestra faced with a modernist adventure rather than with just another performance of a repertory piece coarsened by years of being presented to unsophisticated audiences in the distortions of superstar *maestri.* Here can be heard as well the transparent sound, in which the French musicians of the time were trained, that must have been in Stravinsky's ears when he wrote the *Rite.* And here too is Stravinsky as a conductor with reserves of youthful energy as yet undiminished by age.

The result is a rendition as dry in sound as the 1960 recording is lush. The opening bassoon solo, for example, clumsy though it must have been to play in 1928, seems to

4 Heard today, even on adequate equipment, these 78 RPM originals understandably fall far short in sound of what they might become when rejuvenated by sophisticated contemporary reprocessing techniques.

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suggest the cold spring of Russian experience, and not, as it often now suggests, the quasi tropical foliage of southern California. The famous barbaric chords near the beginning do not seem the piquant exercises in mild dissonance they are in today's performances; the French musicians of an earlier day, it is evident, heard them as willful impositions of dissonant sound rather than as logical constructions. As a whole, the orchestral playing on these old records is without that quality of trembling emotion so fashionable on today's concert platforms.

What do these features of performance mean for our understanding of the *Rite of Spring*? The answer is simple. To hear the 1928 recording is to understand something of what caused the uproar when the work was first performed in Paris in 1913 and the combination of shock and delight which marked the *Rite*'s progress through the musical world. The lack of sentiment which can be heard in these grooves must have appeared to the cultivated pre-World War I audience as a taunting rebuke to received nineteenth-century ideas—not just of music and art, but of order, civilization, and human feeling. What seemed a heartless provocation to some members of the musical audience then was a titillation to others, and the civil war in art that ensued is still with us today, fought by different forces on different battlefields. For us to understand Stravinsky's achievement in this way is to raise the *Rite of Spring* from the level of an orchestral blockbuster to that of its true status as a formative element in our twentieth-century sensibility.

On a less exalted plane, something of the same lesson of authenticity can be learned from comparing another set of Stravinsky recordings. Unlike the *Rite of Spring*, the *Ebony Concerto* (1945) is hardly a major contribution to our cultural lives. Written by Stravinsky for Woody Herman and his band, this short three-movement composition is at once derivative in its evocation of swing and comparatively slight in its musical substance. The verve of its syncopations, however, and the easy way in which Stravinsky manages to penetrate the idiom of American commercial jazz give it considerable charm, and the work justifies frequent performance.

In the new Columbia set, the *Ebony Concerto* appears as recorded by Stravinsky in 1965 with Benny Goodman as the clarinet soloist and the "Columbia Jazz Group" as the orchestra. The performance is dull and under-rehearsed. Occasionally it lacks even minimal ensemble precision; generally it lacks sympathy for either swing or Stravinsky. By contrast, Stravinsky's original 1946 recording (long since unavailable), with Woody Herman himself as the soloist and his own band as the orchestra, is both an outpouring of instrumental virtuosity and an incandescent reading of the composer's intentions. On page after page of the score, the first recording puts its successor to shame. The performance of a difficult passage in the second movement, for instance, containing a sequence of alternating beats and offbeats, is faster, surer, and more accurate than its later counterpart—altogether a textbook illustration of how to play quick syncopations. Indeed, so poor and unidiomatic is the newer recording by comparison that it may safely be said that to know the *Ebony Concerto* only in its present manifestation is not to know it at all.

Because the musical material is more substantial, the recorded versions of Stravinsky's Concerto for Two Solo Pianos (1931-35) are still more instructive. The stature of this work is incontestable; it remains one of the few great works written for two pianos. Its appearance in the new Columbia package is in a 1945 recording by the team of Vronsky and Babin, then well-known. Their playing here is workmanlike, passingly accurate, and, at best, glossy in surface; frequently it is marked by that slight tendency to rush which was often noticeable in this otherwise excellent duo's playing.

There is, however, another recorded version of the concerto which Columbia might have chosen, flawed in the extreme though it is. This is of a performance by Stravinsky and his son Soulima made for French Columbia in 1938. Stravinsky seems to have thought

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that the recording was never released because of the coming of the war. In fact, some extremely rare copies are extant. A tape of the 78 RPM discs has now been deposited in the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound of the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, where it may be heard but not copied.

This recording may be inadequate—because of problems in both recording technology and Igor Stravinsky's piano technique—but to hear it is to experience the same *frisson* of historical discovery provided by the original recordings of the *Rite* and the *Ebony Concerto*. Soulima's playing of the more difficult first part is fluent, sensitive, and elegant; his father's playing, if less accomplished, is distinguished by several marvelous outbursts of melodic projection and rhythmic authority. The Stravinskys play the second movement, a classically influenced *Notturno,* at a markedly quicker pace than Vronsky and Babin. Though the pace may have been chosen in order to accommodate the approximately 4' 20" time limits of a 78 RPM side, it does accord with the spirit of the composer's own metronome directions.

As with the first Stravinsky recording of the *Rite,* the remarkable aspect of the father and son performance of the concerto is the way it achieves musicality without the faintest glimmer of sentimentality. All is direct, straightforward, natural. This, one feels, is the true aesthetic of Igor Stravinsky, so different from the fevered substitute his admirers have been busily creating over the past generation.

Columbia's choices elsewhere in this new collection betray similar vagaries of artistic and historical judgment. Missing is Stravinsky's own solo playing of the Serenade in A, for instance. The presence here of an estimable performance by Charles Rosen and the availability (for the time being) of a sonically inferior pressing of the Stravinsky performance on Seraphim can hardly compensate for its absence in what is putatively the composer's "recorded legacy." The inclusion here of one work unrecorded by Stravinsky deserves comment as well: the *Sonata for Two Pianos* (1943-44) appears here in a 1961 performance by Gold and Fizdale. In this performance Stravinsky's work sounds like high-class cocktail music.

One can appreciate the dilemma posed to the compilers of this set by the existence of not one but two recordings of the *Duo Concertant* (1931-32), both with Stravinsky at the piano but featuring different violinists. The decision was made to use the later, 1945 performance with Joseph Szigeti. It remains a worthy document of Szigeti's playing and of his service to contemporary music. Thus ignored, unfortunately, is the rougher earlier performance (1933) by Samuel Dushkin, who not only played many concerts with Stravinsky but also collaborated with him in writing the solo part of the Violin Concerto (1931). So highly did the composer think of Dushkin that he prefaced the concerto score with the following words, here translated from the French:

> This work was performed for the first time, on October 23, 1931, under my direction at a concert of the Berlin Radio by Samuel Dushkin, for whom I keep deep gratitude and a great admiration for the high artistic worth of his playing.

This being the case, one can only regret that Dushkin's 1932 recording of the concerto, with Stravinsky conducting the Lamoureux Orchestra, has been rejected by Columbia in favor of Isaac Stern's easily available 1961 recording with Stravinsky conducting the "Columbia Symphony Orchestra," this time in its Hollywood manifestation.

Although Stravinsky wrote one of his most important compositions, the Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments (1923-24), for his own use as a piano soloist, when his son Soulima came of age as a pianist almost a decade later Stravinsky was content to exchange the role of soloist for that of conductor, and with the roles so divided the pair often performed the piece. They were recorded by RCA in 1949, with the backing of yet another New York free-lance orchestra. Heard today, this recording remains excel-

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lent, despite its ensemble irregularities. It is especially noteworthy for Soulima's piano playing, which is rhythmically alive and yet exact. Here is both a historical document and a vital performance; its supercession in the new set by an undistinguished (and less clear) 1964 recording with an aged Stravinsky conducting for Philippe Entremont can hardly fail to raise the question of whether the difficult personal and financial relationship between Soulima and his father and stepmother during the Craft years may not have exercised an undue influence on Columbia's selection.

There are many other examples of Columbia's having passed over earlier performances of enduring historical importance for recordings now available. Among the many recordings that have been overlooked are a restrained and taut 1927 recording of the first suite (and part of the second) from the *Firebird* (1909-10), a 1932 performance of the concert suite from *The Soldier's Tale* (1918) featuring brilliant trumpet playing, a 1931 performance with a Russian choir of the *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), and a 1957 recording of *Persephone* with the New York Philharmonic. A note of regret should be sounded as well for the exclusion of the 1953 recording of *The Rake's Progress* (1948-51), a fond relic of the days when the Metropolitan Opera from time to time performed new works. Not only is this recording an important historical document, but it employs singers—Hilde Gueden, Eugene Conley, and Mack Harrell—who are superior to the singers who replace them in the later recording included here. It also offers the listener an opportunity to hear Stravinsky conduct an orchestra prepared by Fritz Reiner, who led the live performances of *The Rake's Progress* at the Met.

It is not difficult to imagine the reasons for the choices made on the Columbia collection: the better sound and more careful editing that later recording techniques afford; the greater accuracy in intonation and ensemble of later performances, the players' greater ease with the music; and the authenticity supposedly to be achieved by presenting the "last thoughts" of the master as manifested in his last performances. As appealing as these reasons might seem, they are specious when tested against the requirements of history and the responsibilities of historiography.

In present-day recording practice, producing a "better sound" means little more than using space-age recording techniques in order to substitute the judgment of the producer in the control booth for that of the musician in the studio. Recording can be done faster that way, with fewer "takes" and fewer spoiled sessions. And in the control of the outcome by technical personnel can be found the secret of the supposedly error-free rendition of later recordings: they have been produced not by musicians playing perfectly but by editors splicing together the fragments of many different "takes" in order to produce a superficially integrated and continuous product. The greater ease doubtless afforded to musicians by their increasing experience with Stravinsky's music is corrupted by the fact that they have often heard that music in meretricious performances.

The value of preserving Stravinsky's final conceptions of his music is, at least at first glance, a more compelling reason for preferring his later recordings to his earlier. Who, after all, would not want to know what Beethoven thought at the end of his life about how the "Eroica" Symphony or the "Pathétique" Sonata should be played? Who would not be interested in hearing on records how the Wagner who had completed *Parsifal* would conduct *Lohengrin*? But wouldn't it be even more valuable to hear how Beethoven, in the full flush of his virtuoso pianism, performed the "Pathétique," or how Wagner regarded *Lohengrin* at the time of its composition, when his belief in salvation through love had not been yet been transformed by the physical apathy of age?

Because of Stravinsky's having recorded his music throughout his career, we can see both the vigor of relative youth and the possible wisdom of age. The evidence suggests that in Stravinsky's case the vigor of youth is musically preferable, whatever the fruits of

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his later re-thinking. And here a consideration of reality intrudes as well. The last decade of Stravinsky's performing life, the decade of his greatest phonographic activity, was also a time of ill-health, gathering infirmity, and dependence upon others.

Beyond these artistic considerations, an identifiable attitude toward history and its preservation connects the various literary and musical productions which now constitute these Stravinsky centennial celebrations. This attitude is nothing less than the instrumental use of the past to further the interests of the present. In the case of the books under discussion here, the interest cannot but be seen as the image of Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, controllers until now of the valuable Stravinsky material. In addition, in the case of the Stravinsky recordings, the interest is profit—or, more accurately, the lessened loss—for Columbia Records and its parent, CBS.

In the gathering together of masses of biographical trivia and countless photographs of the same people doing the same thing, in the luxurious packaging of a spuriously "complete" (and musically often dubious) group of recordings, truth is submerged in a welter of detail and of consumer goods. Lost only—and how strange it is to say this, considering the historical importance of this material—is history itself: the past as it happened, nothing more, nothing less.

In Stravinsky's case, the tasks of historiography are still to be accomplished. The recent death in New York of Vera Stravinsky will doubtless create a new situation as regards the administration of the Stravinsky papers; whether new hands in control will bring a further objectivity and completeness in their treatment remains to be seen. The situation of the early records is rather more clear, for the rights to them remain in the control of the record companies—chiefly EMI in Europe, and, to a lesser extent, RCA in this country. Their opportunity to give us the heroic Stravinsky still remains. They should seize it.

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Art

El Greco's brush

by David Rosand

There is something at once unsettling and gratifying in the phenomenon of a great artist resisting the categories of art history and of art historians. His art, refusing to accommodate itself to established historiographic structures or to fulfill standard critical expectations, insists on defining its own terms of evaluation. The artist in this case is El Greco (1541-1614), and his art is fully and magnificently presented in "El Greco of Toledo," an exhibition organized by the Toledo (Ohio) Museum of Art—in conjunction with the Prado, the National Gallery of Art, and the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts—and currently on tour in this country.[1]

El Greco's resistance to the controlling formulas of art historiography seems particularly heroic and just, for perhaps no painter of the Western tradition has been so manipulated and co-opted by his modern admirers. Born and trained as an artist on Crete, a Greek island long part of the Venetian dominion, Domenikos Theotokopoulos extended his artistic education in Venice and Rome before moving, by 1577, to Spain. There, he made his home in Toledo, which, although no longer the royal capital, was the most powerful archdiocese in Spain at the time and a major intellectual center. His unusual itinerary seems somehow to confirm the uniqueness of his highly personal style, of which his disturbingly elongated figures are the most obvious expression. Together, biography and style have provided the material for partisan, contradictory interpretations of the painter: as an essentially late Byzantine or quintessentially Hispanic painter, as a mystic contemporary of the great spiritual poet St. John of the Cross (imprisoned in Toledo when El Greco arrived), as the last of the Italian Mannerists, as a visionary or astigmatic (the simplistic fallacy that the artist's eyesight was faulty keeps finding new life as well-meaning ophthalmologists continue to announce their findings), as Expressionist *avant la lettre,* or as misunderstood *peintre maudit* trapped in the Spanish provinces.

"El Greco of Toledo" is an exhibition with a thesis. It seeks "to understand El Greco as a man of his time, not of ours," as Jonathan Brown writes in his introduction to the exhibition's catalogue.[2] Indeed its aim is to dis-

1 "El Greco of Toledo," which opened at the Prado in Madrid on April 11, was shown at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., from July 2 to September 6; it will be at the Toledo Museum of Art from September 26 to November 21 and at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts from December 12 to February 6.

2 *El Greco of Toledo* is a New York Graphic Society Book published by Little, Brown: hardcover, $35; softcover (available only at the exhibiting museums), $13.95. It includes a catalogue by William B. Jordan of the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth and essays by Jonathan Brown (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University), Richard L. Kagan (Johns Hopkins University), and Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez (University of Madrid).

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pel the fog of myths surrounding the artist so that another interpretation may emerge.

Historical contextualism informs each of the essays in the catalogue. "The Toledo of El Greco," by Richard L. Kagan, sets the scene, defining the economic, political, ecclesiastical, and social situation of the painter's adopted city; Kagan describes the web of friendships that related El Greco to the most influential churchmen and intellectuals in Toledo and established his important bases of patronage. In "El Greco and Toledo" Brown builds upon that historical foundation and offers a biographical portrait that stresses both the intellectual makeup of an artist schooled in Italian humanist traditions of the later Renaissance and the practical aspects of running a successful workshop. The third essay, by Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, "On the Reconstruction of El Greco's Dispersed Altarpieces," reminds us not only that many of these large canvases were conceived as parts of complex monumental ensembles but also that El Greco's practice included the building arts, from architecture to carving and carpentry.

The El Greco that emerges from these essays is strikingly different from the El Greco of myth. Instead of a tormented Christian mystic or a perversely idiosyncratic genius, we encounter a practical master of an efficiently productive Renaissance workshop—in this respect not unlike Titian or Tintoretto, both of whom contributed importantly to El Greco's development. The transplanted Greek painter now appears as very much the favorite of the elite establishment of Toledo. In that Spanish center he achieved the professional status that had been the ideal of Renaissance art theory since the early fifteenth century in Italy. According to that ideal the artist was no longer to be considered a mere artisan who worked with his hands; the new painter was an intellectual, whose intimate associates were philosophers and poets. Painting was to be counted among the liberal arts. Having lived and worked with such assumptions during his stay in Rome, El Greco took them with him to Spain and—by means of his proud professional stance, particularly in the face of demeaning legalities (usually concerning the fixing of prices for his work)—he set an example that would continue to resonate well into the seventeenth century in Spain. He helped prepare the way for the struggle of Velázquez to elevate his own social position and for the writings of Calderón, who, as late as 1677, actually presented a legal brief in defense of the nobility of painting on behalf of the painters of Madrid, who were suing the tax office.

Like many Renaissance artists of intellectual ambition—not to say pretension—El Greco wrote treatises: one on painting, another on architecture. Neither of them has survived, but some of his ideas on art are preserved for us in his dense marginal notations to two important Italian publications of the sixteenth century: Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* and Daniele Barbaro's translation of Vitruvius's *Ten Books on Architecture,* the only treatise on art to have come down from antiquity. Most of his comments are quite commonplace, repeating standard Renaissance notions on art and the artist; "his ideas," as Brown puts it, "reveal him to have been a typical artist of his time." Nonetheless, some of El Greco's observations, as unexceptional as their first premises may be, strike us as distinctly individual:

> Painting is the only thing that can judge everything else because its objective is to imitate everything. In sum, painting occupies the position of prudent moderator of all that is visible.

If such an assertion of the ontological nature and mimetic function of painting reminds us of Leonardo da Vinci's earlier defense of the art, what follows seems to lead us back to the mystical El Greco:

> And if I could express in words what a painter sees in his sight, it would seem a strange thing because sight shares aspects of many faculties. But painting, because of its universality, becomes speculative and never lacks substance to speculate on because even in partial darkness there are things to see and to enjoy and to imitate.

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Has El Greco escalated the terms of the game? Have we passed from imitation of the visible world to the world of the invisible? I raise such questions not to return us to old myths about the artist, but because the normalizing of El Greco is, finally, not entirely convincing—and certainly not very satisfying.

There is good reason, of course, for being wary of reading too much into the literary evidence. A spurious diary of Giulio Clovio, El Greco's fellow artist and friend in Rome, for instance, was for some time used as evidence of his mystical inclinations. It recorded a visit to El Greco's studio on a sunny day, when the curtains were drawn: El Greco explained to his visitor that he feared the light of day might destroy the light of his inner vision. Unfortunately, the story, like the diary itself, seems to have been a fabrication, the product of an art historian's overly inventive mind. But now we have the painter himself writing of a "partial darkness" in which "there are things to see and to enjoy and to imitate." Dare we speculate once again on that "inner" light?

As the "El Greco of Toledo" exhibition amply demonstrates, El Greco was hardly "a typical artist of his time." However much we wish to acknowledge that his professional training, practice, and ambition locate him securely within the traditions of Italian Renaissance artistic culture, the paintings themselves will not be so easily explained. We instinctively understand why early critics confronted by this art invoked words like *caprichosa* and *extravagante*; Vasari and others had recourse to similar equivocal terms when trying to deal with the art of Tintoretto. The sophisticated aesthetic of Mannerist painting in mid-sixteenth-century Rome may serve to modify our reaction to the extreme elongations of El Greco's figural style and its arbitrary formal operations, but its refined artifice—whatever part it played in his early development—is finally irrelevant to the energies of the Greek painter's surfaces; it is unable to account for their spiritual conviction. No matter how insistently they press the surface, no matter how finely matched their shared contours, his figures never indulge in the stylistic self-satisfaction of the accomplished Maniera. Their charge, most immediately stated in the stark contrasts of intensely saturated color, is more urgent.

A crucial aspect of his figures' conviction is, of course, the power of El Greco's brush, the development of lessons learned in Venice. Having studied the art of Titian and Tintoretto, as well as that of Veronese and Jacopo Bassano, El Greco pushed to the limit the implications of Venetian *colorito*. This is the kind of painting that Titian first taught the world, in which pigment, brush, and canvas-weave interact to create an emerging fabric of color and tone, light and dark, and varied textures of impasto and cloth. The appeal of such painting is tactile as well as visual. (We may presume that when El Greco [supposedly] declared himself ready to re-do Michelangelo's *Last Judgment,* he intended to replace the fresco with a monumental oil painting on canvas.)

As in the Venetian painting El Greco most admired, the energy of the brush informs his imagery; the vibrant patterns of directed gesture and the record of application of paint to canvas not only afford the unifying ground of a given composition, they also serve as mediator between the worlds contained within the image itself—they connect matter and idea, earth and heaven. On the largest scale, we are impressed by those ascending movements of flickering strokes, of shaped color, of heaven-aspiring lights that govern the altarpieces: the brush itself functions as the essential constituent of pictorial structure on every level. Its flame-like quality, entirely consonant with El Greco's figural aesthetic, operates as more than generalized metaphor. The iconographic core of the *Annunciation* (catalogue number 32) offers one articulate example: between the figures of the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Gabriel a burning bush, which burns but is not consumed (Exodus 3:2), symbolically proclaims Mary's perpetual virginity; its flaming petals are rendered as grand tapered strokes of the brush. This particular identity of pigment and idea, making possible the pictorial realization of

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an iconographic motif, El Greco learned from Titian's *Annunciation* in the Venetian church of San Salvatore. Great painters think with the brush.

And yet, despite its debt to Titian's example, El Greco's brush is ultimately less grounded, less rooted in this world. Although he consciously adhered to a mimetic theory of painting and although his early Spanish work in particular exhibits a masterful naturalism, El Greco came to exploit a more explicitly charged tension between earth and heaven. The lower zones of his religious paintings generally offer a necessary foundation in this world: a concretely realized natural detail, a landscape fragment, an immediately perceptible view of Toledo. Moving higher in the field, however, his brushwork loosens, surrendering much of its impasto materiality and discovering new release, and his colors lighten. Following the activity of that brush we find ourselves engaged by a pictorial process of transcendence.

Roger Fry may have exaggerated, truncating part of the experience of El Greco's art, but his perception still rings true. In 1920 he wrote of El Greco as "a singularly pure artist," by which he meant a singularly modern one.

> He expressed his idea with perfect sincerity, with complete indifference to what effect the right expression might have on the public. At no point is there the slightest compromise with the world; the only issue for him is between him and his idea. Nowhere is a violent form softened, nowhere is the expressive quality of brushwork blurred in order to give verisimilitude of texture; no harshness of accent is shirked, no crudity of colour opposition avoided, wherever El Greco felt such things to be necessary to the realisation of his idea. It is this magnificent courage and purity, this total indifference to the expectations of the public, that brings him so near us today, when more than ever the artist regards himself as working for ends unguessed at by the mass of his contemporaries.

In the margins of his copy of Barbaro's Vitruvius, El Greco himself nearly confirms this modern elitism when he observes:

> Although it may seem that the masses have a vote in architecture and in music or rhetoric or painting, the fact is that this happens only when time and informed opinion have revealed the truth. And if once in a while popular taste is right, it is usually by accident and is not worth taking into account.

El Greco's art must indeed have made special demands on its audience, and everything we know of the patronage he enjoyed in Toledo suggests that his appeal was to an elite. Presumably, however, the heavenly aspirations of his style satisfied more than just the refined taste of the connoisseur. Its grace was surely more than aesthetic. Its eloquence must have had an effect on a larger, more humble congregation of Christian viewers, for the iconographic content of El Greco's imagery is hardly arcane; it is marked rather by a fundamental clarity, that legibility of spiritual affect called for by the counter-reformation.

Still, only those more knowing viewers and admirers of his art—like Fray Hortensio Félix Paravicino (whose portrait in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts is one of El Greco's finest) and the poet Luis de Góngora, both of whom composed poetic epitaphs on the painter, that *mayor Apeles*—would have appreciated the *art* of it, the skilled genius of a brush that refused to "compromise with the world." Even, perhaps especially, in the portraits does El Greco's brush triumph over nature, forcing its subjects to yield to the higher requirements of pictorial necessity—and yet finding renewed life in that artifice.

Fry claimed that modern artists could look back with reverence to El Greco because of the lessons of Cézanne. In fact, the critical rediscovery of El Greco in the nineteenth century may be traced back a generation earlier, to Théophile Gautier, whose *Voyage en Espagne,* published in 1845, offered the first positive revaluation of the "extravagant,

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bizarre" adoptive Spaniard, and to Delacroix and Millet, both of whom owned paintings by El Greco, and to Manet. El Greco's earliest nineteenth-century admirers constituted an essentially professional audience of poets and painters.

When the young Picasso first encountered the paintings in the Prado (in 1897) he wrote with enthusiasm, "Some of El Greco's heads are magnificent." If Picasso's own pictorial response to El Greco seems primarily directed toward figural expressiveness, the purely painterly qualities of those "magnificent" heads tend to confirm Fry's judgment on the relevance of Cézanne to our vision of El Greco. The dialectic of brush stroke and edge, for example, the one moving against and yet implying the other, is a spectacle we appreciate in both painters.

In the room of portraits in the "El Greco of Toledo" exhibition one was especially impressed by a synthesis of those terms—of stroke and contour —that yielded images of deep humanity. Working with an austerely limited palette of grays, browns, and whites, and without ever quite taming its own assertiveness, El Greco's brush created correlative structures, surrogates to nature that breathe a life of their own and yet lend some of that vitality to the effigies they feign: the splash of black exploding from the eye, stray bristles establishing a dark radiance that conveys more than just eyelash; the aggressive crimson gash set disturbingly into the pallor of the face that seems as much wound as mouth, its far corner curiously strengthened as if to counter any tendency to foreshorten that form.

This is not the kind of flesh/paint equation that we expect, say, in the work of Titian or Rubens or Rembrandt, in their several different ways. Nonetheless, if El Greco's paint, like the proportion and pose of his figures, seeks a certain transcendence, it is of mimetic reference; for we find ourselves constantly aware of its quality precisely as paint, manipulated pigment. Although moved by the quiet spirituality of El Greco's portraits, we remain equally responsive to their bravura execution. That is one of the great lessons of this exhibition: the tension between the spirit of content and the matter of form, between the transcendent aspiration of the imagery and the professional self-consciousness of the image-maker.

The painter's self-awareness is declared most consistently by the artful placement of his signature. Whether inscribed on a rock or on a *cartellino* affixed with sealing wax, held in a serpent's mouth or initialed on a lion's brow, the artist's overt affirmation of his creative responsibility guarantees his continuing presence in the life of the image. Two instances assume an especially personal and telling significance. In the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (not in the exhibition) El Greco signed himself on a folded letter tucked into the pocket of the young boy who directly intercedes between the viewer and the scene; generally identified as the painter's son, Jorge Manuel, he carries the document, in Greek script, of his own paternity: *doménikos theotokópolis e'poiei* (Domenikos Theotokopoulos made him).

The *Purification of the Temple* (catalogue no. 3), a work from El Greco's Italian years and the second version of a favored counter-reformation subject that would occupy him frequently, bears a kind of double signature. In addition to the inscription on the step, in the lower right corner four portrait heads intrude: Titian, Michelangelo, Giulio Clovio (who introduced him to Roman society and patronage), and Raphael. Near the very beginning of his public career, then, El Greco prominently acknowledged his artistic heritage. And to the end of that career he would remain faithful above all to the professional identity that marks his first historical appearance, in 1566, when he signed a notarial document as *Maistro Menegos Theotokopoulos, sgourafos* (Master Domenikos Theotokopoulos, painter). On that basis, as a painter, he remains very much of our time—even as the personality of his art continues to elude and challenge us.

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Letter from London

Reflections on a candlestick

by Roger Scruton

The Victorian public spirit, having taken the name of Prince Albert, built a memorial to itself in a corner of London where followers of the Victorian idea still congregate during the promenade season, rehearsing their attachment to a musical culture which is at once popular and sublime. Across from Scott's scrupulously pedagogic memorial stands the Albert Hall, like a giant dish cover, with a ceramic frieze declaring that poetry, transfixed in pottery, is eternal. Next to it stands the Royal College of Organists, its façade veneered with embossed and painted tiles, each continuing the classical motifs which culminate in the Greek anthemions of the chimneys. In the background the red-faced mansion blocks stand in matronly postures, their balconies like folded arms, observing from high windows the order to which public and private make equal contribution. Wealth and achievement shine forth from every building, and the architectural forms are as near to civilization as mere education can come.

Only one detail mars the arrangement: the glass and concrete exterior of the Royal College of Art, built by Sir Hugh Casson to replace buildings thought to be inadequate to the increased social utility of this institution. Founded in the last century, the Royal College now devotes itself to graduate studies in a subject called "design." It is not alone in believing that there is such a subject. At the dinner which marked the opening of the College's recent conference on design methods, the guests included industrialists, chairmen of government agencies, and a junior minister. The Prime Minister herself wrote a foreword to the official brochure, expressing her faith, for those who might have doubted it, in the indispensable social function of "design." Delegates from industry, the universities and polytechnics, and the schools of architecture and engineering were to attend in their multitudes to hear reports of developments in a subject so apparently fertile as to require four simultaneous sessions, every morning and afternoon, over four consecutive days.

As chairman to one of the sessions, I was invited to the dinner, which took place in a senior common room of rough concrete, with aquarium windows, nylon curtains, grey cord carpets, and spotlighted ceilings. The one architectural merit of this room was that it provided a view over the rich Victorian arrangement that it spoils. At desert, the junior minister rose to give a speech, expressing the curious opinion that, with more attention to design, our exports might rival those of the Japanese. I pondered this idea for a while, and then began to search the room for some home-produced object that a Japanese tourist might wish to take back with him. My eye came to rest on a Regency candlestick, part of the legacy of beautiful things which the College is still able to display. Among all the products of "design" that littered the walls, ceilings, and architectural crannies of the senior common room, this object alone stood out as a possible export.

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The ruling idea of the candlestick can be summed up in two words: dynamic and detail. Its form springs from the combination of bold movement and delicate ornamentation. The fluted oval column rises on a firm architectural base and supports an urn of exquisite design, in which the candle rests. The beaten silver makes quiet reflections, while the innumerable lines and moldings cast small soft shadows into every silvery pool. There are no edges, only lips, where the structure, having extended itself in one direction to the limit of usefulness, relinquishes its claims to the neighboring space and folds over. The base, too, is without an edge: its oval rim is brought to a gentle conclusion by a ridge of moldings. It neither bites the surrounding space nor crushes against it. The base of the urn is slightly pinched, marking the point where the vertical thrust of the column expires. At every pause and juncture some simple and effective embellishment provides a commentary on the underlying dynamic of form. The whole is harmonious and restful and at the same time energetic, confident in its form and movement, abundantly alive.

The surrounding architecture is the opposite of all that I have just described: static, harsh, without detail (except the arbitrary detail provided by the imprint of rough-hewn boards). It presents itself to the observer as a series of edges, without softness or movement. Its forceful denial of life, of light and shade, of any control other than the most blatant, its absence of language, of correspondence, of drama, its inability to move, to yield, to dance—all this is experienced as a denial of the observer's presence. Such architecture inevitably forces upon those contained in it a sense of the arbitrariness, the provisional and temporary nature, of their social activities. The room dully waits for people to vacate it, so as to resume the stony discipline from which it has been disturbed.

Such architecture bears everywhere the marks of "design." It was made for a purpose, with an informed sense of choices among materials and patterns. It is a memorial to "function." It is of course true that a function which so palpably ignores the nature of human beings is one that is better left unperformed. But this does not alter the fact that, conceived as a "solution" to a "design problem," the senior common room, with its space, light, and prospect, is exemplary. The candlestick, by contrast, is a disaster: expensive, fragile, in need of constant cleaning, wasteful of space, and chary of light. No design theorist could ever have conceived such a thing. Yet it has a pulse, a rhythm, an organic completion which makes us happy to remain in its presence, happy to put it to those social uses which, in the presence of the senior common room architecture, all too rapidly expire. The "classical" quality of the candlestick is but another name for the principle of human life, which accommodates every fluctuating purpose that we bring to it. If there is a function in such an object, then we know that it is worth performing, because of the transcendence of function that animates its every line.

During the next morning's session I once again found myself confronted with a product of design: this time a lecture hall. It had no windows, for windows are distracting. Its seats, approached by two aisles at the sides, were stacked up in lines, so as to provide maximum accommodation together with an optimal view of the lecturer. The whole room sloped downward like an amphitheater, to a large white screen before which the lectern stood. Large stocks of equipment—microphones, tape recorders, lanterns, projectors—were provided as "audio-visual" aids. The result is familiar in every modern university. The lecturers, not being actors, are overborne by the theatrical arrangement; they respond by either shouting in hectoring tones or mumbling in panic. Because the equipment is there they feel bound to use it; but its use requires a kind of competence that few lecturers possess or ought to possess. Thus, during the course of the morning we found ourselves several times confronting diagrams of abstract ideas, including a strange picture of Kant's theory of the human faculties, which apparently looks like a vacuum cleaner.

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Anyone who has observed human beings knows that, given the choice, they will sit in places where they feel either completely safe, or able to get away in a hurry. Hence, they occupy only the ends of the rows in such a lecture hall. Latecomers and exasperated sufferers have to squeeze into or out of the center, creating a constant commotion. The absence of windows, too, is a design theorist's fantasy. Human beings can concentrate only when distraction is available; the view from the window is an essential refreshment to the weary faculties. Without it the audience begins to wilt.

It was for the speakers, however, to bring the true folly of "design methods" to our attention. The point was established most vividly by a paper concerned with the "transformational grammar" of visual shapes. The speaker argued that such a "grammar" (which he imperfectly characterized) would be the first step toward a computerized language of forms. He illustrated the thesis with two sets of schematic shapes which, while barely intelligible to the eye, could be seen after much thought as the first five letters of the alphabet. A member of the audience, who said that he was a typographer, expressed interest in the idea but wondered how it might help us to understand the difference between Times Roman and Perpetua. The answer was that the theory does not yet permit us to make that distinction, but in time we shall encompass it.

It was then that the absurdity of the enterprise became apparent. What time was to accomplish in the realm of theory the human eye has known for centuries. We neither have nor need the theory to which our "design" student referred. We can make a choice between two forms which no computer can understand by using those very organs which the products of design theory offend. Times Roman stands to the schematic lettering of the computer rather as the candlestick stands to its surroundings: It involves a set of visually intelligible patterns, adapted to human use, in which dynamic and detail combine to produce an organic complexity of form. It is functional precisely because it transcends function, because it ceases to be a solution to an imaginary "problem" that a computer might have understood.

After the conference, I began to look again at some of the studies in "design methods" which have had such disastrous effects upon the teaching of architecture in England and America. Something of their flavor can be gleaned from a paper published in 1966 by Christopher Alexander and entitled, with Corbusian bombast, "The City as a Mechanism for Sustaining Human Contact." Here is a typical extract:

> Let us assume that there are two children per household in the areas where children live (the model figure for suburban households), and that these children are evenly distributed in age from 0-18. Roughly speaking, a given pre-school child who is x years old, will play with children who are $x - 1$ or $x + 1$ years old. Statistical analysis shows that in order to have a reasonable amount of contact, and in order for each child to have a ninety-five per cent chance of reaching five such potential playmates, each child must be in reach of twenty-seven households.
>
> If we assume that pre-school children are not able, or allowed, to go more than about a hundred yards in search of playmates, this means that each house must be within a hundred yards of twenty-seven other houses.

Thus the design theorist proves that, in order to achieve a "reasonable" amount of contact with his neighbors, a child must live within a hundred yards of twenty-seven houses. Did Huckleberry Finn have a reasonable amount of contact with his neighbors? If so, what possessed Mark Twain to ignore those twenty-seven houses, so vital to his hero's development? Many novelists have written about childhood in this irresponsible way. Fortunately the matter has been taken out of their hands. We can now "quantify" the basis of a child's satisfactions; our administrative decisions can therefore reflect a more "rational" assessment of the human situation.

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It is characteristic of the theory of "design" that Alexander's article has been accepted as a major contribution to it. Such criticism as it has received has taken the form of further refinement, rather than contemptuous dismissal. Lionel March, writing in a collection of pretentious papers called *The Architecture of Form* (1975), holds that Alexander's analysis of the human predicament is all right so far as it goes. But it ignores the element of uncertainty. Its numerical intuitions should be expressed in probabilistic terms; it is only the norm of human choice that is captured by Alexander's quantifications. So there can be no "solution" to Alexander's "problem" until it is framed in the language of probability theory. March lays out certain half-understood axioms of that theory in order to illustrate his meaning. He does not actually *offer* the "solution" that we are promised: his point is merely that we are progressing towards it by the steady sophistication of our "methods" of "design." But of course the idea that there is such a thing as a "reasonable" amount of contact, to be defined through "statistical analysis," the mock exactitude of the decision that children need to be within reach of five potential playmates, the peculiar assumption that a hundred yards is the limit to which children are able to stray from their homes—these conceptions are in fact entirely spurious. They are the upshot of an unserious fantasizing about human existence which would be comic were it not dangerous.

In the same volume, March gives what I believe is the best expression of the aims and methods of "design theory," revealing its true intellectual character and its true potential for complexity. Design, he argues, is a philosophical problem. He ponders over the works of philosophers of science, and, having made nothing of them, produces a diagram. (Here one senses the influence of the "design" theorist's lecture hall.) This is called the PDI (production/deduction/induction) model and is meant to capture the true intellectual essence of design. According to this model, "rational design" proceeds in the following way:

01.1 From a preliminary statement of required characteristics and
01.2 a presupposition, or protomodel, we produce or describe
01.3 the first *design* proposal.
02.1 From design *supposition* and theory and
02.2 the first *design* proposal we deduce or predict
02.3 the expected performance *characteristics.*
03.1 From the performance *characteristics* and
03.2 the first *design* proposal we induce, or evaluate
03.3 other design possibilities, or *suppositions.*
The cycle then begins again:
11.1 From a revised statement of *characteristics* and
11.2 further or refined *suppositions* we produce
11.3 the second *design* proposal.

And so on. It is not difficult to detect here, in the unnecessary arithmetization of the sequence, in the occultist pretense at system, and in the absence of any serious scientific or mathematical concept, the same fantasy mathematics that was exemplified in Alexander's description of children at play. Nevertheless, March's careful examination of the underlying "methodology" of his subject enables us to see what "design theory" is all about. Translated into plain English, March's "model" amounts to this: you make a design, and you try it out. It is perhaps on the strength of such discoveries that the Royal College of Art has chosen to appoint Lionel March as its Rector.

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Books

Where art intersects with life

by Hilton Kramer

The emergence of a really fresh and distinctive voice in the realm of art criticism is a rarer phenomenon than is commonly supposed—rarer, certainly, than the emergence of a striking new talent in art. For this reason, as well as for others, the publication of Sanford Schwartz's *The Art Presence* must be regarded as something of an event.[1] For this collection of essays on nineteenth- and twentieth-century painting, sculpture, and photography is the real thing—criticism that can be trusted to illumine rather than to obscure the objects of its attention. It displays a remarkable independence, too, both in the quality of its perceptions and in the very choice of its subjects. And it is written in a prose style that, while not without certain flaws, is lively, lucid, friendly, and completely faithful to the experience that animates it. Few recent books of art criticism have been written with such immediacy and verve.

Mr. Schwartz, who is now in his early thirties, is not exactly a newcomer to the New York art scene, but he writes at a certain remove from the current hurly-burly. For the better part of a decade, he has been contributing art criticism to a variety of journals—including, from time to time, *The New Yorker*—and writing prefaces to exhibition catalogues. Yet, because he has not been regularly employed by a prominent periodical or officially attached to some powerful academic mafia, he has been slow to win the readers he deserves. During the period that Mr. Schwartz has been writing about art, much of the so-called "serious" criticism devoted to the current scene has passed into the hands of ponderous academics, who, besides being incapable of producing a clear and understandable sentence about anything they have experienced firsthand, have been far more interested in attaching themselves to the reigning intellectual orthodoxies—structuralism, semiology, deconstructionism, feminism, Marxism, and sundry other impediments to aesthetic perception—than in examining what artists actually do in their work or, for that matter, fail to do. It is much to his credit, therefore, that Mr. Schwartz has remained something of an outsider in this situation.

He has also remained unswayed by the din of publicity that inevitably attends the activities of an art scene as busy and as competitive as New York's has been in the past decade. He follows the scene closely, he knows what is going on, but he invariably follows the dictates of his own sensibility and taste in choosing his subjects. These, more often than not, he has found among artists—most of them Americans—whose work, though it may be well known, other critics have lately neglected, misunderstood, or not adequately appreciated. Many of these artists belong to the first generation of American modernists—Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe, Max Weber, Charles Demuth, Elie

1 *The Art Presence,* by Sanford Schwartz. Horizon Press, 247 pages, $13.95

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Nadelman, Gaston Lachaise, Paul Strand, et al.—and about them Mr. Schwartz writes with a depth of feeling that no critic has equaled since the publication of Paul Rosenfeld's *Port of New York* in 1924. Indeed, these essays are so sharp and sympathetic, so inward in their understanding of both the successes and the failures of the artists of this generation and so attentive to their individual qualities, that they leave us a little irritated with their author for not having gone further and written a full-length study of the subject. But that is a feeling that the best criticism is always likely to leave us with.

Something of Mr. Schwartz's quality as a writer and critic may be gleaned from the very first essay in the book, which is devoted to one of the "textbook classics," as he calls it, of nineteenth-century American painting—Thomas P. Anshutz's *Ironworkers: Noontime* (circa 1880-82). When this smallish picture, which measures seventeen by twenty-four inches, was included in an Anshutz exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1973—the occasion that prompted Mr. Schwartz's original article—it was very much in the limelight, for it had just fetched a quarter of a million dollars at auction. Yet the painting, which gives us, in Mr. Schwartz's words, "a sunlit panorama-like picture of factory hands in various stages of a midday break—washing, playing tag, strolling, posing, lounging, flexing muscles, daydreaming," was something of a sport, both in Anshutz's oeuvre and in the American painting of the time. He never painted anything like it again, and neither did anyone else, and he never painted anything as good, either.

It seems to me that Mr. Schwartz has gone right to the heart of the matter in his account of this odd little masterpiece, to which, as far as I know, no other critic has paid such thoughtful attention. He understands that the social and historical implications of its subject matter are likely to mean more to us than they ever meant to Anshutz, but he does not neglect the historical dimension of the painting on that account. "In his unrhetorical, plain way," Mr. Schwartz writes, "Anshutz captured the sleeping-giant strength of post-Civil War America as no historically self-conscious painter did, or, perhaps, could have. His terms matched those of his Wheeling, West Virginia factory hands. He was as self-confident and as emotionally unformed—even blank—as they were." Mr. Schwartz then goes on to make a brilliant comparison with Eakins, a far greater painter, who was Anshutz's teacher:

> Eakins, with his more complicated feelings about American society and his bohemian personal style, perhaps knew too much to be able to look at ironworkers as anything other than remote figures—animated, at best, by a dour persistence in doing their work right. As a picture of the American industrial scene, that would have been subtly wrong. It would have given that scene a quality of underlying tragedy that wasn't there.

For Mr. Schwartz, the enduring appeal of *Ironworkers* does not lie in the realm of social documentary, but in a very different area of art and experience:

> From reproduction, *Ironworkers* looks as if it's a blood relative of the naturalistic American novels, but the painting's spirit is closer to later, more modern writing, to the chaste, word-perfect symbolic naturalism of Stephen Crane and Hemingway. Like these writers, Anshutz's first loyalty is to his exalted idea of craft, which pressures him into accepting the scope of a miniaturist. I think there is also a connection between the picture's deliberate "smallness" of vision, its self-conscious refinement of means, its fastidiousness of paint handling, and the fact that it presents a world made up only of what one nineteenth-century writer called "a group of half-naked men," most of whom are in their late teens, twenties and early thirties. Anshutz was on the track of a picture that could measure up to Eakins; along the way, he knew he was doffing his cap to infant American industrialism; but his truest subject for us, buried possibly from his conscious mind, was his own burgeoning self-confidence as a young man about to step into full manhood. . . . [*Ironworkers*] is the great "young man's" painting of American art.

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OSIP MANDELSTAM, Complete Critical Prose & Letters. Tr. J. G. Harris. 1979. 725 pp. Cloth edition at paperback price: $12.50.

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This is indeed a new voice in American art criticism, and in the criticism of American art. Its principal interest lies precisely in those places where art intersects with life—first the artist's, then our own and the life of the culture that is inevitably modified, however subtly or piecemeal, by the experience of some genuine achievement in art. This is criticism that does not so much argue with either the formalist or the sociological views of art as absorb them, without making any special fuss about it, into a looser, more direct, more commonsensical response to aesthetic experience. It is not the kind of criticism that fights battles or enlists itself in causes. It may at times even sound a little innocent about the battles raging elsewhere, but it isn't. It simply does not regard them as more important than the art itself.

Even so, Mr. Schwartz does not hesitate to call attention to the ways in which other writers on art display their special interests—and thus run the risk of misrepresenting what they have set out to elucidate. In this area, he does not select small and easy subjects for discussion, either. He is always mannerly, he never raises his voice, but his points are clearly and firmly made—and they are often devastating. Thus, on Leo Steinberg's study of Rodin:

> This is probably the most intelligent and scrupulous case that will be made for the French sculptor for some time. But it has a fancy tone that doesn't really do him justice. You feel that Rodin would have liked the elegantly formulated analyses Steinberg lavishes upon his pieces. Yet they profundize what doesn't feel profound. They serve to keep pushing away from us what we can't help coming back to when we think of Rodin: his vulgarity.

And this on Robert Rosenblum's essay for the catalogue of "The Natural Paradise" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art:

> . . .what happens when illustrational resemblances are emphasized is that, whether it's intended or not, all art is reduced to the same weightlessness. Rosenblum's method allows

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> you to talk about the museum masterpieces and the shlock classics in the same tone. He extracts the "mood" and the "look" of a work and doesn't judge the level of feeling in either.

And this on Susan Sontag's *On Photography:*

> Atget is one of the few [photographers] she admires, yet she can only give herself to him after she has converted him into a class-conscious, socially subversive figure. To do it, she has him follow in the "footsteps of the rag-picker, who was one of Baudelaire's favorite figures for the modern poet." Atget is sent on his anti-bourgeois way, picking up "marginal beauties of jerry-built wheeled vehicles, gaudy or fantastic window displays, the raffish art of shop signs and carousels," etc. Sontag's point would be valid if we knew that Atget was attracted to the shop signs because they were "raffish," but from what we know of him, we have no idea that that was his motive. And since she wants him to be concerned only with "marginal beauties," she leaves out of her list of his subjects over half the things he did: the pools and walks at Versailles, the Austrian embassy, the Luxembourg gardens, the court at Fontainebleau, the scenes of the Marne and the Seine, modest and neat middle-class interiors, and so on. . . . Making him into a collector of kitsch, which is what Sontag means by rags, misuses his spirit.

Such criticisms of criticism are all the more remarkable when one realizes—as one does in reading these essays—that Mr. Schwartz is something of an admirer of all of these writers.

I have already mentioned his essays on the early American modernists. He is particularly penetrating about the artists of the Stieglitz circle, for he appreciates better than most other writers on the subject the extent to which the modernism of these American artists, unlike that of their European contemporaries, amounted at times to a rejection of the modern world insofar as it was defined by the speed and crowds and intensities of urban, industrial civilization. In his fine essay on Hartley, for example, Mr. Schwartz observes: "Except for Demuth, whose appetite for nature was satisfied by what was in the garden, and who is most alive as an artist when he suggests the erotic underlife of things, all the painters in the Stieglitz circle worked from landscape. Like Ryder, they weren't interested, in their art, in society, history or personality. They were private, lyric poets of places and moods that stayed the same regardless of society. . . ." And it is this insight that allows him to grasp one of the essential impulses in the photography that came out of the Stieglitz circle. Thus, about the photography of Paul Strand he writes:

> His language—his plain, documentary-like, straightforward style—has a modern feeling to it, but the story he wishes to tell is a nineteenth-century one, or at least one that is far from us in time. Like other members of the group that periodically clustered around Alfred Stieglitz, Strand was an urban intellectual who, in his work, was more at home with a romanticized dream of a pastoral—or at least non-urban—existence. Strand did make art out of city life. When he was young, New York was his leading theme as it had been Stieglitz's. But Strand dropped the city, and its pace, from his work.

It is in this light that one can understand the degree to which Strand's photographic journeys to Ghana and rural Vermont and the Outer Hebrides, among other places, represented, in effect, a lifelong quest to repeal the twentieth century.

Mr. Schwartz is equally sharp in writing about certain of his own contemporaries—Alex Katz, Lucas Samaras, Myron Stout, Diane Arbus, and Helen Leavitt, for instance—but the weight of *The Art Presence* is largely carried by the essays on an earlier generation of American artists and on recent criticism. There is very little attention directly paid to the great European modernists in this book, though we are made aware of them—in the wings, so to speak. But if Mr. Schwartz's recent essay on de Chirico (published in *The New Yorker* on June 28, and thus too late for inclusion in this book) may be taken as an

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augury, it is to a consideration of these figures that he may now be turning. If so, it will certainly be interesting to see what he does with them. If *The Art Presence* is a guide, it will not in any way conform to the cant and clichés that afflict so much of the criticism devoted to the visual arts today.

Twilight in Italy

Enzo Siciliano Pasolini: A Biography. Translated from the Italian by John Shepley. Random House, 435 pages, $20

Pier Paolo Pasolini Poems. Selected and translated from the Italian by Norman MacAfee, with Luciano Martinengo. Foreword by Enzo Siciliano. Random House, 231 pages, $10.50

reviewed by Vernon Young

Enzo Siciliano's biography, in which Pasolini and his setting are inseparable, brings it all back to me. Rome in the early Sixties: the spectacular kitsch of Bernini's Piazza Navona and of his St. Theresa in sexual ecstasy; the drumhead Castello St. Angelo looming like thunder across the Tiber, with its dungeons and its topside angel; Fellini getting endless takes of his Swedish Venus rising from the foam in the Fontana di Trevi; the torpid afternoons and the endless, mindless evenings; the *pizza capricciosa* gatherings on Saturday nights, to which the anti-American Italians were always late and the Americans didn't mind because, to a man, they believed that every German was responsible for Hitler, *no* Italian was responsible for Mussolini. And the chatter-chatter-chatter in the trattorias: the onstage smile, the mistrust under the skin, the want of saving courtesy, the fanatical aversion to reflective silence. Remembering all this and much more (Baroque or uncooked), I am not as surprised as I might otherwise have been to learn that for twenty-five years a considerable number of Italians took Pasolini seriously as a *political* personality when, the truth is, he was a poet at war with time and with the sexual fate thrust upon him by random yet determinate causes.

Siciliano is Pasolini's ideal historian; he recalls in selective detail the unselective passions by which the man lived and for which he gruesomely died. Pasolini's early years comprise such classic elements of the homosexual alibi as to forestall belief, were Siciliano's narrative not so firmly rooted in the circumstantial: the defeated fascist father, tyrant in his own household (if Pasolini was to be half believed); the tremulous anti-fascist mother who first encouraged the child Pasolini to write poetry (in her native dialect of Friulia); the pastoral dalliance with golden lads who would inevitably migrate to the cities and join the heterosexual horde of the enemy. Add to these an active anti-fascist brother who was shot by fellow partisans and you have all the personae necessary to inspire Pasolini's future ambivalence as a political dissenter, as a defender of bucolic traditions, and as an emotional purist for whom nobody can replace Mother and only the *ragazzi* of the Roman streets can replace the father whose love he never shared.

I don't expect this supercilious formula to *account for* Pasolini's life and art. But one has to have guidelines and these are inescapable in the chronology, the subject seen from the outside. The inside is either in the poetry or it is nowhere on earth now, irreclaimable even by his excellent biographer. One does wonder why, in his Foreword to the poems, Siciliano contradicts his more equivocal interpretations in the biography, insisting that Pasolini was substantially an "ideological" poet who moved towards socialistic and democratic values. (If he intended this claim to reassure American readers, he forgot that for many Americans, socialism and democracy are not readily associated with one another.) All the evidence of Pasolini's poetry and polemical journalism, much of the latter furnished by Siciliano, makes very clear that he became progressively less socialistic *and*

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less democratic. He never forgave the Christian Democrats for achieving prosperity; he never forgave the Italian people for accepting it, instead of believing with him that poverty is the foundation of virtue. Clearly he was suffering from the same shock of recognition that had assailed D.H. Lawrence who, virtually in the year of Pasolini's birth, had recognized that the earth had turned toward another terrible dawn when the primal connections of men with their physical environment—connections which had remained intact in Italy long after they had been severed in the North—were broken forever, *with the consent of rural man himself.*

Pasolini rediscovered on his own pulses the truths of Lawrence's *Twilight in Italy*; his response to them was complicated by his umbilical relationship to that twilight. He became a Communist when, contingently, the Party sided with the farmers of Friulia—his mother's country—against the landowners. Thereafter he confused a simplistic belief in Communism as the defender of peasant traditions with his personal nostalgia. Conspicuous in the poems, muffled in his quasi-political manifestos, was his inability to reconcile the homoerotic innocence of his provincial adolescence with the homoerotic guilt that overtook him among the *ragazzi* of the "splendid, miserable city," Rome. His perennial confidence in Communism or in the Church, neither of which he ever radically renounced, stemmed from the hope that between them they might arrest the advance of industrial democracy and restore an Italy of his boyhood idyll (which was nonetheless the Italy of Mussolini!).

His poetry (translated here by Norman MacAfee with remarkable diligence and style) is only intermittently "civil" or "ideological" in the Dantesque fashion which Siciliano, mystifyingly, would like to impose on it. (For such a resemblance the primary requirement is missing: the historical moment). The more likely source for one of Pasolini's cloven temperament is the verse of Baudelaire, the paradigm for those who take their pleasures downward and invest them with rhetorical glamour until that hour, which always arrives, when inward despair is more powerful than the bravado of diabolism. Like so many of his fraternity, Pasolini could seldom make up his mind whether he adored himself as an "outcast" and treasured that "warm sack" which was his sole affinity with his fellowmen, or whether he despised himself in sardonic agreement with those (their numbers I am sure he exaggerated) who disapproved of his genderless condition.

All this, and other personal conflicts, he fought out in his poetry, which, though it retained some form of trimeter as late as the Sixties, became, after the marvellous elegy *The Ashes of Gramsci* (1954), increasingly idiomatic as it became correspondingly solipsistic. There is small point in criticizing the inconsistencies of the paraphrasable content; his poetry is not in his argument but in his language. Readers with an ear for Italian will appreciate the fierce thrust of Pasolini's self-torment, the operatic cadences and the phosphorescent vernacular, the revery and the denunciation, the curses and the tears—and the quick expressionist glimpses of Rome, especially those of his earlier days (post-1950) "in the African sunlight and the agitated rains" when he lived "poor as a cat in the Colosseum in a slum of dust clouds and limestone" and every bus ride was "a calvary of sweat and anxiety"—while "around the inner dominion of vulgarity [the cafés and the cinemas!] the city crumbled into rubble. . . as though from a voracious leprosy/that drunk with death" delighted in laying one human stratum above another.

To suggest that sustained moviemaking should have rescued Pasolini from his tighter self is probably idle. He didn't want to be rescued. The wonder is that his commitment was so generous. I recall some quite dazzling Italian films of the late Fifties on whose scripts he had collaborated: *Il Bel Antonio* and *La Giornata Balorda,* for example. I am less willing than Siciliano to take him solemnly as a film *director,* but I have not seen all the films he made. On the basis of those I have seen, I would define them as a lesser contribution to the category of the grotesque, of which

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Buñuel is the master. To the medium Pasolini brought a kind of rough-cut poetry, kinky with "anti-film" theories which were all the rage in the Sixties. In exceptional instances he was showman enough to fortify his scenarios with magnificent arid landscapes or with a single egregious personality who diverted one's attention from everyone and everything else: Anna Magnani in *Mama Roma,* Maria Callas in *Medea,* that jet-eyed Spaniard who played his hating Christ in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew.* I find it significant that the great Italian peasant movie was made by someone else: *The Bandits of Orgosolo,* filmed by Vittorio de Seta on Sardinia and by the short memory of critics now consigned to oblivion. The force of Pasolini's artistic expression was more often focused on the degeneracy of the "unchangeable" peasant in the ghettos, not on the conditions of his prelapsarian existence.

Siciliano informs us that by the time Pasolini arrived at filming *Salo, or The 120 Days of Sodom* (which I have not seen) in early 1975, despair and hate had replaced in him the joys of Eros. "His repudiation of the bodies and sex organs of the *ragazzi di vita* [announced in one of the 'Lutheran Letters' he wrote for *Corriere della Sera*] was not the result of an intellectual mannerism. The river of time had overflowed images and ideals." *Salo,* described by Siciliano as "steeped in Sadean ritualism and symbolism," sounds to me like a thoroughly macabre effort to depict sexual transgression and violence as exclusively a product of totalitarian conditioning.

In these years before the end Pasolini's public gestures were fated to displease nearly all but the reactionaries whom he had vilified on other occasions. He opposed a bill of divorcement offered for legislation in 1974 because, in his view, it was a triumph of the consumer values associated with the United States. Siciliano has provided a parenthetical reason for Pasolini's disapproval. "Heterosexual coitus, induced by permissiveness, would wipe out in the Italians an ancient tolerance—the one that made lower-class youths available for homosexual relations without prejudice to their heterosexuality." Siciliano passes that on without a smile! This, too: when further legislation was proposed to permit abortion, Pasolini took his stand against it, on the grounds that abortion was the legalization of homicide. "In my dreams and everyday behavior, I live my prenatal life, my happy immersion in the maternal fluids, and I know that there I existed . . ." In other words, if you legalize abortion, not only are you retroactively affronting his mother, you are also reducing the probability of a Pasolini's being born at all!

The rest is cinema. For some time a waste patch of ground near the "penalty area" of a shabby playing field at the Ostia seaplane basin had been waiting for Pasolini and his *ragazzi di vita*—like the tree in *The Pardoner's Tale.* On the evening of November 2, 1975, Pasolini, in his Alfa Romeo, obeying his unkillable custom, picked up a young hustler near the Stazione Termini, in this case Giuseppe Pelosi, whose nickname translates as Joey the Frog. Pasolini drove him to the Ostia locality, where (this is Pelosi's unreliable testimony) Pasolini attacked him with a fence post and he was forced to defend himself—by butchering "the gentleman." It is *inferred,* from unresolved evidence, that they were in fact shadowed by four others, allegedly pimps for the whores of Piazza dei Cinquecento, who for reasons inscrutable killed, or helped Pelosi to kill, Pasolini by beating his head in, kicking him in the scrotum, and, the decisive measure, under which the victim's heart burst, by driving the Alfa Romeo over his savaged body.

Pasolini had often composed epitaphs for others. Few of them were more appropriate for the setting of his own death than these haunting lines he wrote for Antonio Gramsci, buried in Rome's English cemetery:

> . . . this sparse, scentless
> grass, into which, with a shiver
>
> of mint or rotten hay, the violet
> twilight sinks, quietly foreshadowing
> with daylight melancholy the night's
> exhausted trepidations [*la spenta trepidazione della notte*].

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Jung and company

William McGuire Bollingen: An Adventure in Collecting the Past. Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, 340 pp., $18.50

reviewed by James R. Mellow

William McGuire's gentle and genial chronicle of the Bollingen Foundation and its services to scholarship in the fields of mythology, psychology, mysticism, and various forms of esoterica is not, by any means, a history of mere fads and fashionable ideas. But during its less than three decades of active operation—it was dismantled in the late 1960s and its publishing operations transferred to Princeton University Press—it was one of the few prestigious cultural organizations dedicated both to the recovery of the past and to the promotion of a spiritual approach to modern problems, an approach that was hospitable to mysticism and some of the odder branches of the occult.

The Bollingen Press, begun in 1940 by Paul and Mary Mellon, had as its worthy aim the publication of the writings of C.G. Jung, the most mystically minded of the founding fathers of psychoanalysis. (Both Mellons had undergone brief Jungian analyses and attended Jung's seminars in Switzerland. The press itself was named after Jung's tower retreat in the little town of Bollingen on Lake Zurich.) Under the aegis of the Bollingen Foundation, incorporated two years later, the Mellon millions sponsored important archeological expeditions (excavations at Samothrace, a center of Greek mystery cults), offered fellowships and grants-in-aid to eminent scholars, artists, and poets, and sometimes to indigent novelists (many of whom were driven out of Europe by the Nazis), established poetry prizes and distinguished lectureships (the annual A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts), and engaged in ambitious publishing ventures that few commercial publishers would undertake. These ventures included an imposing list of art-historical studies by such scholars as E.H. Gombrich, Erwin Panofsky, Jacques Maritain, and John Pope-Hennessy as well as major writings by the poets St.-John Perse, Paul Valéry, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal; and volumes on such far-flung subjects as the sacred texts of Egyptian tombs, Kabbalist mystics, Navaho war ceremonials, and the classics of Zen Buddhism. Among the best-sellers on the Bollingen list are Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* a classic study of symbolic archetypes, and the *I Ching, or Book of Changes,* a source book on a three-thousand-year-old Chinese method of divination by means of casting a bundle of yarrow stalks that became an enormous fad with the hippie culture of the 1960s. The *I Ching* still sells briskly today, having reached total sales of more than a half million copies in 1982.

The Bollingen history, then, is one of high-mindedness coupled with high finance. But it may help to see that history, with its lofty pursuit of the spiritual and the occult, from a slightly different perspective if we remember that mysticism and money were not always the comfortable bedfellows we now take for granted. The great mystics of the past—St. Teresa of Avila or St. John of the Cross, for example—regarded materialism as the great obstacle to the spirit; they practiced poverty and self-abnegation as the surest route to God. Peter of Alcántara, another sixteenth-century saint and mystic, wore sackcloth and lived in a cell only four feet wide, so that he could not lie down when he slept (which was only an hour and a half each night in any case). When St. Teresa first met him in the summer of 1560, he was a frail bag of bones. "To eat every third day was very usual for him," she wrote. "And he said to me, why was I astonished for it was possible for anyone who got himself accustomed to it." She was also told that Peter had once gone without food for eight days; she suspected that he must have been "in prayer" at the time: "For he had great raptures and impetuosities of love of God, of which I was once a witness." Nor should it be assumed that these earlier mystics were eager for religious ecstasies. At least not in public. Visions and rap-

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tures of that kind only caused gossip and rumor and brought them to the attention of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, always eager to prosecute heretics and religious eccentrics. Some saints even begged God to relieve them of such troublesome favors, preferring to take the hard way of silence and prayer and charitable works.

Nowadays, of course, it is difficult to imagine lives of such austerity. The skies are full of flying swamis, jetting from ashram to ashram. Some people do their transcendental meditations in designer jeans on plump sectional sofas. Others prefer to take the chemical route—by way of pot and pills—to Nirvana. And while the Bollingen is hardly responsible for the current vogue for spiritual exercises and easy mystical experiences, its sponsorship of spiritualism and the occult by way of generous grants to eager scholars and institutions is, especially in its more doubtful programs, another example of the contemporary notion that humble pie is best served à la mode.

Institutional histories are usually dull or too exciting by far. Partisan historians bring to the task a piety that inevitably becomes boring; muckrakers search for scandals that all but bury real accomplishments. William McGuire, who was the Bollingen editor for *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* and *The Freud/Jung Letters* and is now an editor for the Princeton University Press, has approached the Bollingen history with marvelous tact and subtle humor. He makes it clear, for instance, that from the beginning the Mellon largesse was an irresistible attraction for scholars, opportunists, academics, inspired amateurs, geniuses, and for what the art critic Herbert Read once described as "wasps of every hue and size." Read, invited in 1946 to become a consultant on the complete edition of Jung's writings, wrote a British publisher: "I think we have struck oil on this particular project." (The twenty-volume edition, a magisterial effort, was not completed until 1979.) The British scholar Kathleen Coburn was laboring heroically at transcribing and annotating the seventy notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge when, in 1952, Bollingen offered not only to underwrite her efforts but to extend them to include a complete edition of the poet's writings. (The twenty-five volume project is scheduled for completion in 1985.) Her enthusiasm is understandable: "It was no longer just cart and carthorse. Bollingen put a Rolls-Royce under the whole thing." Bollingen's beneficiaries seem to have a talent for the apt metaphor.

Quite likely it was Mary Mellon who created the impression that the Foundation was the golden gateway for every scholar in the humanistic disciplines. According to McGuire, when Mrs. Mellon had her first private interview with Jung, she announced: "Dr. Jung, we have too much money. What can we do with it?" Her generosity took a number of forms. During World War II, for example, she regularly sent Jung care packages of butter, salt, and fats, until the psychologist begged her to stop; it was costing him valuable ration points just to claim them at the post office. And knowing the mandarin propensities of the Jung circle, she once advised her representative to a Zurich conference to court a particularly important Jung disciple, Mary Foote, by way of champagne, caviar, and dinners at the Baur-au-Lac. It was Mary Mellon's enthusiasm for fortune-telling and oracles that led to the protracted translation and publication of the *I Ching*, a project of some ten years' duration.

Paul Mellon's stewardship of the Bollingen Foundation after his wife's death in 1946 seems to have been more circumspect. But even so, reading between the lines of McGuire's narrative, one senses that the Bollingen history was at times a matter of haphazard benefactions. An old-boy network of scholars with influence (or Jungian connections) recommended friends and acquaintances for projects that were occasionally dubious; odd-ball organizations came hat-in-hand and were awarded long-term grants that went awry. A project by Natasha Rambova—ballet star, dress designer, former wife of Valentino, and a favorite of Mary Mellon's—was vaguely described as a com-

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bination of astrology, theosophy, and the mythology of Atlantis, with the ostensible purpose of demonstrating that "the knowledge of the meaning of the destruction of Atlantis" had significance for modern civilization and its numerous discontents. A ten-year, $96,000 grant given to an institute for applied psychology wound down into an attempt to prove that the plays of William Shakespeare had been written by Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury.

Every organization has its embarrassments. (In the early phases of World War II, the Bollingen Foundation was investigated by the FBI, presumably for giving aid and comfort to alien philosophers. Its communications with Switzerland and Jung were stopped for the duration.) McGuire does not try to hide the fact that an air of eccentricity and occultism, if not the odor of sanctity, has clung to the Bollingen name. And he can be drily amusing, too, about his own visits to "archetypal Zurich" and the egotism and obfuscating rhetoric that he often encountered in meetings with members of the Jungian circle. He describes Jolande Jacobi, a Jung disciple, as one of the rare extroverts among the usual Jungian introverts. They must have been a glum bunch indeed, since he notes that Jacobi's apartment was "an island of warm hospitality, humor and clarity" by comparison. He also makes it clear that, so far as the recipients of the Mellon largesse were concerned, charity did not necessarily begin at home. Jung became a bit paranoid about the long delay in the publication of his prolific writings, accusing the Bollingen press of "virtual suppression of his work." Another recipient of Bollingen funding, Olga Froebe-Kapteyn—the imperious director of Eranos, a conference center for the study of eternal verities and new ideas, in Ascona, Switzerland—described her benefactress as "hasty, sudden, unbalanced often in her ideas" but acknowledged in what appears to be a compliment that Mrs. Mellon had "rare insight into those things that are important for the new forms of culture"—meaning Eranos and its programs.

But in the main, McGuire devotes his attention to Bollingen's indisputable achievements: its sponsorship of the Mellon lectures, for instance, one of the most important lecture series in the country, and of the publications derived from them, which include such notable volumes as Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* and Kenneth Clark's *The Nude*. The Bollingen Fellowships, discontinued in 1966, included such projects as a five-volume work on Michelangelo, the letters of Henry James, and the complete works of Paul Valéry in English translation. Under the guidance of Paul Radin, some forty of these grants were devoted to anthropological studies, many of them relating to the American Indian. And McGuire provides a balanced accounting of the Bollingen's most controversial moment, the awarding, in 1949, of the Bollingen prize for poetry to Ezra Pound for his *Pisan Cantos*. Pound was then in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, following his indictment for treason. The decision brought a storm of protest around the country, but the foundation stood firmly behind the choice.

All in all, McGuire has fulfilled in admirable terms a difficult and touchy assignment. His history of the Bollingen Foundation does exactly—and very well—what he explained was his intention, using some borrowed phrases from the author of *The Education of Henry Adams*: to state "with the least possible comment, such facts as seemed sure, in such order as seemed rigorously consequent." With such a subject and covering such spongy terrain, it is no small accomplishment.

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Notebook

The Beat convention

by Andy Stark

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*—"the book that turned on a generation"—was celebrated in late July and early August with an "*On the Road* Conference" sponsored by the Naropa Institute of Boulder, Colorado. The conference was billed as a cultural event, at once a festival in honor of Kerouac's art and an opportunity to study at the feet of the many poets of the Beat generation (mostly Kerouac's friends) who were in attendance. According to the brochure, for instance, the purpose of the conference was to "estimate [Kerouac's] literary accomplishment and its influence on its cultural successors" and "to celebrate his exuberance, his suffering, his sacramental curiosity and meditation on the spectacular humdrum details of our lives." Certainly this was the appeal for many of the participants. Emulating Abbie Hoffman, the self-described "poet-warrior" who attended the conference, they were mostly poet-waiters poet-postmen, poet-insurance salesmen, and poet-accountants. In many ways, too, they were typical conventioneers who might well have had slapped on their chests day-glo name tags reading, "Hey, man, I'm. . ."

Much of the conference was indeed faithful to its announced purpose. There were, for example, panel discussions—featuring "scholars and friends of Kerouac's"—on Kerouac's writings and his place in American letters. These often took it for granted that Kerouac's apparently heightened perception provided him with a "genuine American vision" rivaling Whitman's. There was also discussion of his much mythologized life, in other panels with such titles as "Gossip and Recollections" and "Kerouac and Women." Four Kerouac biographers were on hand to sort life from art.[1] (Kerouac's "sexism," for example, was a figment of his art; he never practiced it in life.) And there were writers' workshops, for the poet-avocationists, presided over by Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky, among others.

None of these events, however, captured the heartbeat of the conference. It was, in essence, much like a mid-term policy convention of an out-of-office political party, and the family-reunion atmosphere and low stakes only added to the effect. "Where do we, the Beats, go from here?" was the real question

1 Biographers, at least, according to the brochure. They were: Ann Charters, professor of English at the University of Connecticut and author of the first "scholarly" biography of Kerouac, *Jack Kerouac*; Dennis McNally, a "PhD scholar" from the University of Massachusetts, whose book on Kerouac is *Desolate Angel* (he is now preparing a biographical study of the Grateful Dead); Gerald Nicosia, author of the forthcoming *Memory Babe*, a Kerouac biography the research for which was described as being "phenomenally extensive"; and Paul Jarvis, who spent an afternoon with Kerouac some time in the late 1960s but who has yet to write about it. Lawrence Lee, the author of *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography*, although promised to be in attendance, did not show up.

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of the conference. It was asked by poets and novelists, but it was to be taken only one way —politically.

The political agenda, and the contentiousness it inspired, were everywhere evident, but nowhere so clearly as at the panel discussion of the conference's second night, "The Political Fallout of the Beat Generation." The panelists were William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Abbie Hoffman, and Timothy Leary—the people everyone came to hear. Hoffman summed up his account of the Sixties by saying that "power is not a dirty word." Leary, taking a different view, responded by saying that Hoffman "sounded like [Gordon] Liddy," and went on to make the point that the Beats and the hippies were not "into" current events; they were mainly concerned with mind-expansion. Hoffman, whose ambivalence toward drugs is expressed in his motto, "never buy, never refuse," couldn't agree. "If you don't regard the years you spent in prison as a political act, Tim, then you took one trip too many." Hoffman and Leary, it should be pointed out, were not originally part of the Beat movement, although they seem to have made themselves honorary members for having carried the Beats' standard into the 1960s.

Paul Krassner, the panel's moderator, took a stab at reconciling politics and the drug culture by observing that a person's decision to take drugs means that he trusts his friends more than he trusts the government. The *decision* to "drop acid," he said, is more important than the experience. This struck a responsive chord in a young schoolteacher from Missouri, who lamented that his students don't take drugs in the "spiritual, poetic way we did in the Sixties." To which Krassner responded, mock-aghast: "You mean they do it for *pleasure*?"

Ginsberg, the acknowledged leader of the Beats, took issue with Hoffman's celebration of the political by saying that hippie-yippie culture brought to America the politics of confrontation, not the expansion of consciousness. That, in his view, was a tragedy. If "the movement" hadn't brought the Vietnam War home in the way it did, Ginsberg suggested, the War might have ended six years earlier. "A new world is a new mind," he said, more or less quoting William Carlos Williams. Ginsberg also proved capable of pushing the buttons of racialist innuendo, even if accidentally. Someone in the audience, noting the absence of blacks on the panel, and indeed their general scarcity among the participants, asked Ginsberg why there were so few. "I think we're remiss about blacks," he replied; then he pointed out that "they're among the musicians." After three seconds of stunned silence, the hisses came, long and low.

Burroughs, cerebral and laconic, observed that once a situation is defined as a problem it has no solution. Thus, once the Beat generation became political in the 1960s it became futile as well. In Burroughs's view, the reason is simple: culture is expression, politics is action—which makes talking about politics almost a contradiction in terms.

Burroughs's remarks would seem to suggest that whenever cultural figures confront political questions directly they run the risk of fecklessness, if not disingenuousness, especially when they are talking about "the urgent need to act." Certainly the conference itself did nothing to suggest otherwise. Time and again the student-participants, most of whom had paid between $160 and $240 for the ten-day affair, found themselves in front of panelists who talked about political action instead of art. Some of the students took advantage of the opportunity to ask for guidance, although they did not always find it. "The first person to refuse to register for Reagan's war machine has just been indicted in Denver," one man pointed out. (He was responding to a panel discussion called "How the 50s, 60s, and 70s led to the 80s.") "What should we do?" "You just gotta get out there and do what you're doing," was Hoffman's reply. Another man had had enough. "We've got to stop talking and start doing," he shouted into the microphone. The irony manifested itself in a ripple of embarrassed laughter.

The artless politics of the "artists" in attendance were most prominent late in the

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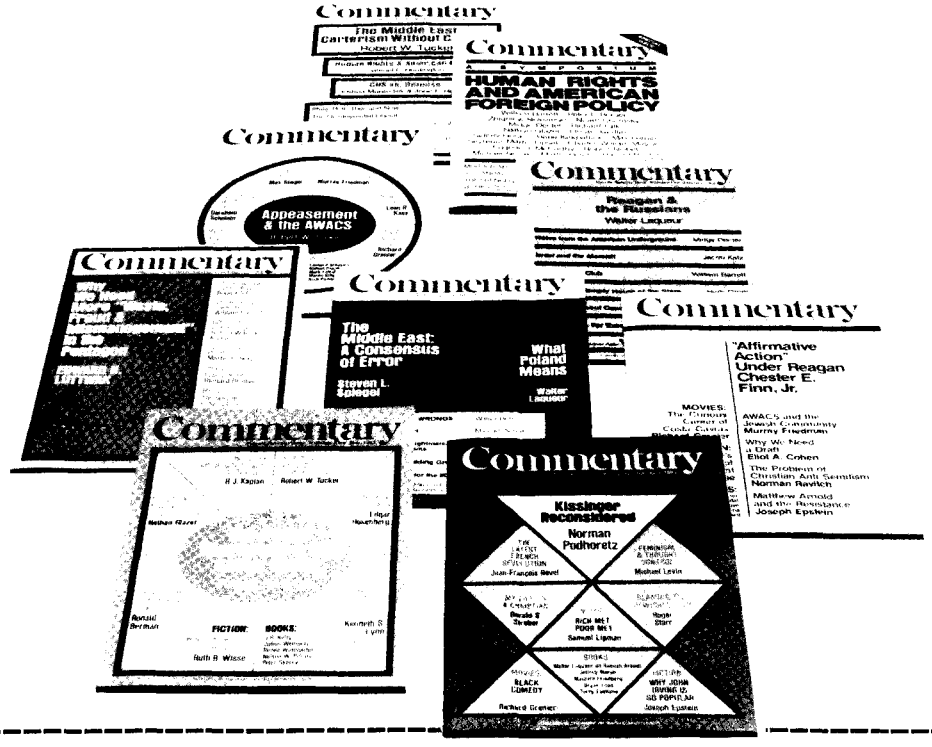

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conference, at a panel on censorship and the Beat generation. Question-answer exchanges were again revealing. "Do you have any suggestion as to how we can fight?" Ginsberg: "Don't fight, amuse yourself by creating art." "Are any of you disillusioned with art or the pen as a freeing force?" Author Jay Landesman, a certified member of the Beat generation: "I am. Life seems too short for prose." "Define politics for us." Michael McClure, poet: "The art of the possible." Lawrence Ferlinghetti: "Force." McClure went on to suggest that untalented writers or painters give up art, pick a threatened species, and try to save it.

That, if anything, sums up the spirit of the "*On the Road* Conference"—and its irony. For, simply by "being cultural," by expressing themselves uninhibitedly in the 1950s, the Beat generation induced the government to confront its members, in trial after trial (the most notorious being that inspired by Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*). In so doing, they helped to eliminate what political restriction of cultural expression had remained in this country. The Beats of the 1950s never really had to turn programmatically to political questions in order to have a political effect, because in the 1950s politics met culture more than half way whenever it dealt consciously and censoriously with art. But by the mid-1960s the Beats felt that artistic expression in and of itself had lost its political effect. They decided to deal with politics directly, as the subject matter of their art. Their inability to do so either intelligently or effectively—so much in evidence at the conference—was clear early on: even to Kerouac.

In an essay published the day after he died, in 1969, Kerouac judged the guardians of the Beats' legacy. Ginsberg and Hoffman, he pointed out, had never even lived in the ghettos, either mental or physical, by which they were transfixed. And Timothy Leary's drug culture was premised not on the idea that reality is mundane and needs enlivening, but on the idea that reality is dangerous and needs to be escaped. Kerouac's inclinations were of a different sort.

Indeed, considering Kerouac's cultural tastes, one might well wonder exactly what his experience consisted of. The conference brochure says that he was exuberant, that he saw the spectacular in the humdrum; and that if he suffered, he suffered with the consolations of a martyr. Allen Ginsberg and others at the conference went so far as to describe *On the Road* as a profusion of ecstasy and an outpouring of celebration. But the words on the page tell us something very different.

On the Road is in fact an unrelievedly unhappy book, filled with the sad eyes, the sad lean-tos, the sad bars, and the sad lives of the America Kerouac sees from his car window. Depression, not elation, is its governing emotion. Moreover, it is often difficult to distinguish the sadness of Kerouac's own feelings from the sadness he attributed to

Erratum: The second paragraph in the right-hand column of page 19 of the September issue of *The New Criterion* contained an error. This passage of Elias Canetti's memoir should have read:

> The words I annoyed Brecht with, especially the demand that one could write only out of conviction and never for money, must have sounded downright laughable in the Berlin of those days. He knew precisely what he wanted and was so driven by his goal that it made no difference whatsoever whether he got money for it or not. On the contrary: after a period of straitened circumstances it was a sign of success if he did receive money. He had great respect for money; the only important thing was *who* received it and not where it came from. He was certain that nothing could make him swerve from his path. Anyone who helped him was on his side (or else cutting into his own flesh). Berlin was teeming with patrons: they were part of the scenery. He used them without falling prey to them.

We apologize to Mr. Canetti and our readers for this error.

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what he saw. This is in fact one of the book's major weaknesses. As a writer, Kerouac was incapable of reacting imaginatively to what he did encounter. He couldn't handle it. He was too absorbed in his personal unhappiness to recognize that his judgment of the lives of mid-century Americans, most of whom saw themselves as happy and humane, was a form of condescension, derived more from the pathos of his own life than from a genuine artistic "vision" of America. The organizers of the "*On the Road* Conference" remade this sadness and pathos into ecstasy and heroism, even as they made Kerouac's cultural positions political and the conscious conservatism of his later years, expressed in his views on drugs and the Vietnam War, for example, into quaint working-class predilections and amusing peccadilloes.

Beat America was a sub-culture, "sub" because it comprised apolitical sub-societal dropouts. And it was a counter-culture, "counter" because it was defined as anything that the dominant culture of the 1950s was not. The Beats themselves would have had an especially difficult time articulating a political position for the 1980s. Acting politically means, in part, acting to win, but as a sub-culture the Beats had no use for the very idea of winning. And their counter-culture is not really a counter-culture any more. At least one source of discomfort for the participants at the "*On the Road* Conference" was the fact that the dominant culture they would pretend to oppose is in large part of their own making, and it is not clear at all whether Kerouac would have liked it—or them.

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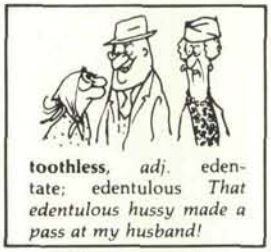

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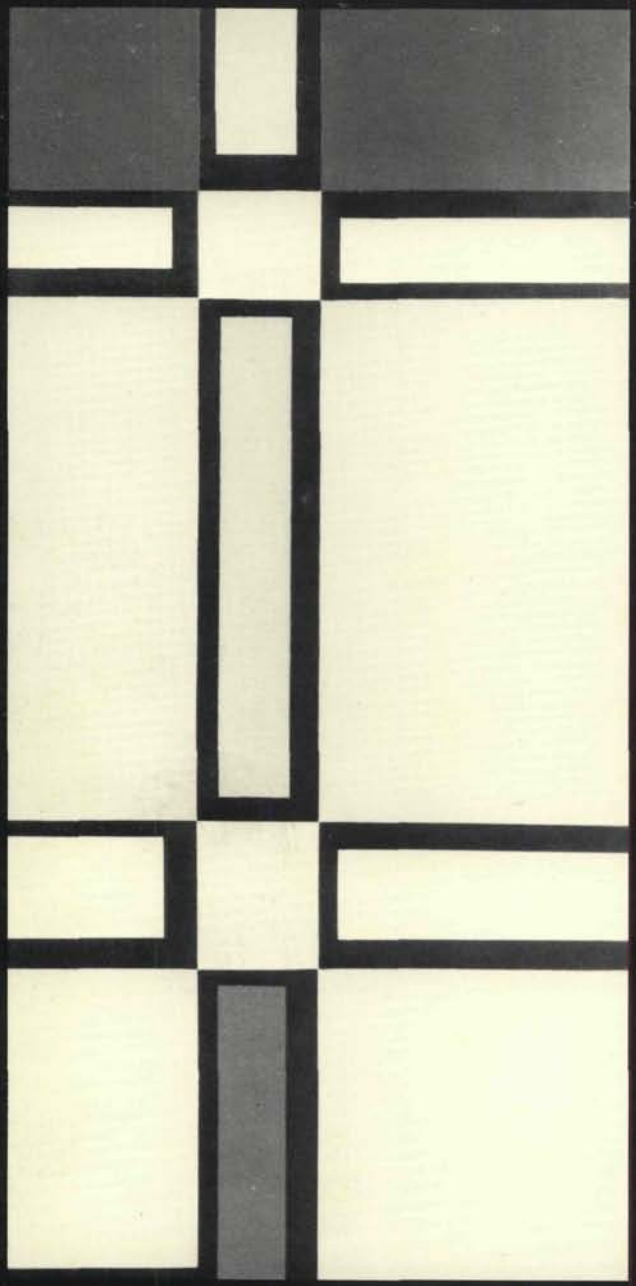

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